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La fagocitosis de las identidades en Borges: el ejemplo de Pierre Menard

"Como la claridad del relámpago,
como se evapora la gota de orvallo,
fugaz es el pensamiento de sí"
(Príncipe Ikku)[1]

Más de diez años después de su muerte, la imagen de un Borges ciego tejiendo sus ficciones prosigue asombrando nuestra imaginación. Para un escritor que parecía nutrir un profundo desprecio por la idea de identidad, el culto personal que hoy se constituye en torno de su figura representaría un grave error. Borges es el más *citado,* Borges es el más *admirado,* Borges es el más *singular* de todos los autores latinoamericanos. Él, que pensaba en la muerte como liberación del individuo de sus máscaras personales, es ahora alabado por su "importancia" y "originalidad" en la literatura mundial contemporánea (Caillois 179). Sin embargo, toda esa idolatría borgiana, que no cesó de crecer en los últimos años, también colabora, paradójicamente, para producir un efecto opuesto al de la individualización del autor. No hay apenas uno, sino varios Borges: el genio edipo y reprimido de Estela Canto, el cabalista ateo de Sosnowsky, el severo monje de Umberto Eco...[2] (Canto 1989, Sosnowsky 1991, Eco 1980). Así sigue viviendo Borges en la memoria colectiva de nuestra civilización: múltiple, indescifrable, misterioso.

Esa multiplicidad de imágenes o rostros refleja un rasgo esencial

del pensamiento borgiano: la idea de que la identidad es una limitación de las posibilidades del ser; una ilusión que oculta toda la inconsistencia de la noción cartesiana del individuo.[3] Tal idea ha sido ampliamente estudiada por la crítica, que nunca cesó de señalar el anti-subjetivismo de Borges. El objetivo de este texto es proponer la identificación de una imagen recurrente en la poética antipersonalista de Borges, analizando, posteriormente, su manifestación específica en el cuento "Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*". Esa imagen puede ser representada en la siguiente ecuación: 1. *confrontación* entre un *perseguidor* y un *perseguido*; 2. *identificación* entre *perseguidor* y *perseguido*. En muchos de los cuentos de Borges la identificación de esas figuras es bastante clara. Para citar apenas dos ejemplos pensemos en "El Acercamiento a Almotásin" donde al final se sugiere la confusión de identidades entre protagonista (perseguidor) y el secreto maestro (perseguido) por él buscado; o recordemos "La Prolongada Busca de Tai An", donde los dos personajes principales cambian sus identidades por medio de una sutil artimaña. En otros de sus cuentos la ecuación no se manifiesta de modo tan evidente, sino que se presenta bajo estructuras metafóricas. Es ese el caso de "Pierre Menard", como se verá más adelante.

Es cierto que Borges nunca cesó de discutir y polemizar en torno al tema de la identidad. Él cuestiona las certezas de la subjetividad cartesiana, no apenas por medio de su postura filosófica sino también a a través de prácticas literarias, como la caracterización de sus personajes. Como bien observa Karl-Josef Niggestich, los personajes borgianos comunmente no presentan rasgos individuales definibles: "Ihr Seelenleben bleibt dem Leser verborgen, ihr Charakter zeigt keine Entwiklung noch psychologische Feinstruktur" 'su vida anímica [de los personajes] permanece oculta al lector; sus características no

presentan ningún desarrollo ni idiosincrasias psicológicas' (234, *traducción del autor*). La crítica al principio tendió a derivar directamente esa negación del individuo del "idealismo" de Borges. Discípulo de Schopenhauer y Berkeley, el argentino no podría sino descreer de la validez del concepto de individualidad. Sin embargo, muchos de los análisis más recientes se esfuerzan en deshacer la imagen de un Borges únicamente filósofo o místico. El interesante libro de Gabriela Massuh, *Borges: una estética del silencio*, es tal vez el más representativo de ese cambio de perspectiva en los estudios borgianos (Massuh 1980). Para Massuh, las razones que llevan a Borges a negar la identidad no son de orden metafísico, sino estético. Ser nadie es mejor que ser un individuo, pues la inexistencia de definiciones produce un espacio vacio, de donde pueden emanar múltiples posibilidades creadoras. Es verdad que Massuh no es el primer ni el único estudioso que defiende la búsqueda de una motivación estética central en la construcción del universo mental de Borges. Como ella misma destaca, la revisión del abordaje a la obra borgiana comenzó ya con los estudios de la *nouvelle critique* francesa. El mérito del análisis de Massuh reposa en el hecho de haber demostrado, con claridad y profundidad, la centralidad de lo estético y de lo linguístico en el pensamiento de Borges. Negar tal centralidad es imposible, pero eso tampoco debe implicar la invalidez de toda posibilidad de análisis filosófico. Una cosa es decir que Borges suele *apropiarse* de ideas originarias de los dominios de la filosofia y de la mística para convertirlos en motivos de reflexión estética. Otra, muy diferente, es decir que él no tiene ninguna preocupación auténticamente filosófica[4]. Si Borges fuera únicamente un esteta totalmente despreocupado por la filosofía, la tesis central de Massuh implicaría una grave contradicción. El "silencio positivo" que la estudiosa identifica

como propuesta estética de Borges para superar los límites del lenguaje es una entidad esencialmente metafisíca, o por lo menos *contaminada* de connotaciones metafísicas.[5]

Es cierto que el conocimiento filosófico de Borges es limitado y selectivo. Es cierto también que para él la filosofía es una suerte de *literatura fantástica*. Sin embargo, los cuentos borgianos presentan fragmentos de filosofías diversas, occidentales y orientales que colaboran en delinear una visión del mundo y una concepción estética. Esa visión del mundo de Borges fue definida por Roland Quilliot como una paradójica mezcla de idealismo y realismo: "Il est en un sens immatérialiste, et même solipsiste, c'est-à-dire convainçu qu'il n'y a que mon éxperience du réelle; et en un sens aussi convainçu qu'il y a bien une realité extérieure qui m'englobe, mais qu'elle est irrépresentable et inaccessible à la conscience" 'Él es en un sentido inmaterialista, y mismo solipsista, es decir, convencido de que no existe sino mi experiencia de lo real; y en otro sentido también convencido de que sí, existe una realidad exterior que me engloba, pero que es irrepresentable a la conciencia' (89, *traducción del autor*). Ese *idealismo-realista* es combinado por Borges con elementos de las antiguas teologías gnósticas (donde el dios supremo se presenta como una figura absolutamente *impersonal*) y con una crítica a las limitaciones de la noción de autoría[6]. La mezcla de elementos filosóficos, místicos y estéticos no podría sino dificultar la comprensión de la obra borgiana y multiplicar las vías de acceso a ella. Tal sincretismo hace de la poética borgiana una poética de la apropiación, en la que los componentes oriundos de varios campos forman una nueva entidad, compuesta, múltiple e indefinible. Ni apenas filosofía, ni solamente estética, ni teología pura, la obra de Borges se ubica en todos esos campos, pero no se identifica con ninguno

de ellos. La fusión de ideas y campos epistemológicos es correlativa a la fusión o asimilación de identidades en los cuentos de Borges.

Sin embargo, en el centro de ese laberinto ideológico, reposa la concepción, a la vez filosófica y estética, de que el mundo (tanto el mundo *real* como el mundo *literario*) es producido por la serie de actos interpretativos de la conciencia. En ese proceso, la conciencia se dirige a los objetos (a los textos), los interpreta y se mezcla con ellos. La imagen de la búsqueda y de la sobreposición de *individualidades* apunta hacia un proceso que Borges consideraba como central al fenómeno literario: el acto de lectura, el proceso hermenéutico a través del cual la obra es *engendrada* en el encuentro de las subjetividades del autor y del lector[7]. Para Borges, una obra no puede ser pensada como producto de un individuo, pues su realización efectiva depende de la intervención interpretativa del lector. En realidad, la colaboración del lector cobra más importancia que la del autor, ya que es tarea del primero realizar el movimiento hermenéutico que conduce a la actualización del texto. El texto no se produce en un vacío semántico, sino es resultado, por un lado, de las lecturas previas del autor y por otro, de la lectura secundaria del receptor. Escribir y leer son actividades intercambiables y complementarias. Actividades que se conjugan en el proceso hermenéutico.

Sin embargo, es preciso advertir que no se trata aquí de la concepción clásica de hermenéutica, donde la interpretación es la búsqueda de un sentido oculto, pero dado desde siempre en las profundidades del texto. Para Borges, leer no es una actividad inocente o pasiva. El sentido del texto no preexiste al acto hermenéutico, sino se constituye en el proceso mismo. Cada lectura actualiza determinadas potencialidades latentes en el texto. El intérprete y su objeto se transforman en una única

entidad, compuesta y compleja. El *perseguidor* y el *perseguido*, al final de su trayectoria, descubren que en la búsqueda hermenéutica ya no es posible recortar los límites de las identidades.

Ese proceso de identificación de los sujetos, o de apropiación de uno por el otro, es precisamente lo que describe el cuento "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote". El cuento revela dos empresas paralelas, ambas de naturaleza interpretativa. La primera es la del Borges personaje, que quiere corregir los errores que "empañan" la memoria del fallecido Menard, al mismo tiempo que busca justificar el asombroso propósito del escritor francés[8]. Para que pueda hacerlo, Borges tiene que remontar la cadena de interpretaciones que cerca la obra de Menard. El término que Borges utiliza - "testimonio" - es del dominio filológico. En filología, un testimonio es una copia o versión de un original al cual uno ya no tiene acceso. El establecimiento del original en su pureza depende de la cuidadosa comparación entre los diversos testimonios y sus variantes. Estas últimas, a la vez, se clasifican según su fidelidad a la intención del original, la cantidad de omisiones, adiciones o errores del copista contribuyendo para el progresivo alejamiento de los testimonios en relación al texto original. Los "altos testimonios" de la Baronesa Bacourt y de la condesa de Bagnoregio son los instrumentos que el intérprete va a emplear para reconstituir el conjunto de significación compuesto por los escritos de Menard. Por otro lado, son precisamente las "imperdonables omisiones y adiciones" de Madame H. Bachelier las que Borges critica como elementos de descaracterización de la "obra visible" de Menard[9]. Tales omisiones y adiciones son de hecho imperdonables porque, como dice Borges claramente, la obra visible del autor es de "fácil y breve enumeración".

Sin embargo, no sucede lo mismo con la obra *subterránea* de Menard:

el propósito de (re)producir el *Quijote* de Cervantes. De ese extraño intento, no quedan más que fragmentos y esbozos. La justificación de tal obra no es solamente una empresa exegética o filológica, sino también - y principalmente - hermenéutica[10]. Se trata de buscar la reconstitución de la obra en su integridad real o posible; se trata aún de establecer los objetivos y motivaciones del autor, así como la inserción de su obra en el contexto histórico-cultural de su origen. Pero la comprensión de la obra "invisible" demanda, en primer lugar, el análisis de la obra "visible". Borges empieza por enumerar cronológicamente la curiosa producción poética y artística de Menard. Sin embargo, no ofrece ningún razonamiento capaz de determinar la unidad de ese tan disparatado conjunto. Cabe tal vez al lector la tarea de producir un esbozo de coherencia interna entre los aparentemente desconectados intentos de Menard.

De hecho, de la enumeración de sus escritos, uno puede sacar de inmediato las afinidades profundas que conjugan sus monografías sobre: 1) la posibilidad de construir un vocabulario poético de objetos ideales; 2) las conexiones entre el pensamiento de Descartes, Leibniz y John Wilkins; 3) la *Characterista Universalis* de Leibniz; 4) la *Ars Magna Generalis* de Ramón Lull; 5) la lógica simbólica de Boole. En todos esos estudios se revela el interés por un mismo objetivo: la elaboración de una *lengua universal* matemática, poética o lógica, capaz de permitir la producción de mensajes perfectamente transparentes y unívocos. Se trata de buscar el retorno a un estado de felicidad prebabélica cuando, hablando el mismo idioma, todos los hombres podían comprenderse[11].

Esos y otros intereses de Menard reflejan, en verdad, preocupaciones del propio Borges. Menard también es una suerte de parodia que Borges produce de sí mismo. Pero ¿qué relación pueden tener los textos

representativos de la obra visible de Menard con la elaboración de su gran empresa invisible? Es que en el fondo, tanto la obsesión por la lengua originaria (*Ursprache*) como el objetivo de reescribir el *Quijote* nacen de un *deseo filológico.* La búsqueda de la *Ursprache* es la búsqueda del sentido primer del lenguaje, de su origen hipotético y estructura ideal, que las diversas lenguas artificiales intentan recuperar. Similar es la motivación que anima el propósito de reproducir el *Quijote* de Cervantes. Más que una denuncia de la inutilidad de la crítica literaria tradicional, como afirma Monegal (80), o que "the most accurate (...) commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation", como quiere G. Steiner (73), la intención profunda de Menard, como veremos, es proponer una nueva especie de filología. Si Borges narra la aventura de Menard en forma de una recuperación filológica de las intenciones del autor, éste a su vez, también hace de sus escritos la cifra de un vasto proyecto filológico. Borges recupera a Menard, que recupera el *Quijote,* fruto de la interpretación peculiar de Cervantes de toda una época.

Sin embargo, Menard no quiere producir *otro* Quijote, lo que se podría considerar como un acto de traducción *intralinguística.* Su objetivo es componer *el Quijote.* Esa recuperación de la obra de Cervantes no implica de ningún modo la mera copia del texto original. Lo que al principio intenta Menard es llegar al Quijote por medio de una identificación con Cervantes. De hecho, Borges explica que uno de los textos inspiradores de Menard es el fragmento filológico de Novalis, "que esboza el tema de la total identificación con un autor determinado" (446). El aforismo de Novalis sintetiza la concepción romántica del *Einfühlung* 'identificación': no hay saber humano sin la identificación del crítico con su objeto. La neutralidad científica es una ilusión; comprender una obra significa comprometerse con las motivaciones de

su autor, experimentar las mismas ansias y expectativas de él. Georges Gusdorf, al describir el proceso romántico de la identificación, ofrece un ejemplo perfectamente borgiano: "Le critique littéraire, au bout de son effort, est capable de s'identifier à Don Quichotte, de le faire vivre en lui, et l'instant d'après, il se reconnaît en Cervantès créant Don Quichotte à partir de ses rêves et de ses desillusions" 'El crítico literario, al término de su esfuerzo, es capaz de identificarse con Don Quijote y de hacerlo vivir en él mismo, y al siguiente instante el crítico se reconoce en Cervantes creando Don Quijote a partir de sus sueños y desilusiones' (252, *traducción del autor*)[12].

Es precisamente lo que hace Menard. Aprende el español del siglo XVII, recupera la fé católica y pelea contra los moros. Pero "al olvidar la historia de Europa entre los años de 1602 y de 1918", en el proceso de convertirse en Miguel de Cervantes, Menard percibe que su propósito es menor de lo que debería ser. El verdadero desafío es "llegar al Quijote a través de las experiencias de Pierre Menard" (447), empresa mucho más ardua, pero también mucho más interesante que la simple mímesis de Cervantes. Como resultado, el texto de Menard, cargado por su propia identidad, produce efectos de sentido completamente diversos de los del original. Tomemos con Borges el ejemplo del capítulo XXXVIII de la primera parte del Quijote, donde Cervantes, en su discurso sobre las armas y las letras, "falla el pleito contra las letras y en favor de las armas" (449). Tal orden de prioridades es comprensible en un hombre como Cervantes, viejo militar de una época en que las guerras representan la dignificación del hombre. Sin embargo, lo mismo no debería de pasar con el sofisticado Menard, *homme des lettres* del siglo XX. Para explicar esa aparente contradicción, Borges invoca cuatro interpretaciones y de inmediato descarta las dos primeras.

Madame Bachelier (la intérprete condenada por Borges) cree que se trata de la subordinación del autor a la psicología del héroe; "otros" ven aquí una simple *transcripción* del Quijote; la baronesa Bacourt (una de los testigos fieles de Menard) percibe la influencia de Nietzsche; el propio Borges identifica una característica de la psicología del francés: divulgar ideas que son el estricto revés de las adoptadas por él[13]. Lo que importa en la interpretación de Borges es que presenta la dramática contaminación del Quijtote por la personalidad y el estilo de Menard. Borges reconoce que el texto de Menard es más sutil que el de Cervantes y hasta llega a preguntarse: "¿Confesaré que suelo imaginar que . . . leo el Quijote - todo el Quijote - como si lo hubiera pensado Menard?" (447). Aunque fragmentaria, la empresa de Menard contamina de forma irremediable todo el texto de Cervantes. Después de Menard, uno ya no puede leer el Quijote sin tener en cuenta la influencia de su "reescritor" y las inflexiones producidas por él en la obra de su precursor. En realidad, se podría decir que Menard, con su extraordinario esfuerzo, *se convierte él en el precursor de Cervantes*[14].

Recordemos: Menard parte del concepto romántico de la identificación con el autor del original pero de inmediato lo descarta por fácil o, más bien, por imposible, dice Borges. De hecho, la propia hermenéutica romántica, en sus formulaciones más interesantes, reconoce la imposibilidad de una identificación total, meta ideal del intérprete, pero nunca alcanzable por completo. Los románticos comprenden que *el propio acto de leer ya altera el objeto*. Sin embargo, lo que Menard pretende no es siquiera una (re) lectura del Quijote, sino su (re) escritura. El francés invierte el clásico y lógico orden del proceso interpretativo: el *escribir* pasa a preceder el *leer*. El movimiento de Menard constituye una parábola, no exactamente del proceso filológico,

sino de una trayectoria hermenéutica, según la perspectiva romántica o fenomenológica. Como explica Gusdorf, "La compréhension d'un interlocuteur ou d'un auteur consiste en une confrontation entre deux espaces mentaux, dont l'un tente d'inscrire l'autre dans son territoire intellectuel, par assimilation ou phagocytose, moyennant une profonde mutation du sens" 'La comprensión de un interlocutor o de un autor consiste en una confrontación de dos espacios mentales, donde uno intenta inscribir el otro en su territorio intelectual, por asimilación o fagocitosis, mediante una profunda mutación del sentido' (210, *traducción del autor*). Es verdad que Menard no tiene conciencia de la extensión de los resultados de su empresa. El propósito que le dirige es un delirio filológico: quiere repetir el original en su pureza absoluta; quiere reconstruirlo literalmente, línea por línea, palabra por palabra. Aún más, intenta sustituir la espontaneidad del proceso creativo del original por un rigor científico e "irrefutable". Sin embargo, al elegir la conservación de su identidad, Menard se traiciona a sí mismo. Su meta filológica se convierte en intervención hermenéutica; en una forma de hermenéutica *salvaje*, que se apropia de su objeto y lo modifica. Sin desearlo, Menard produce una transformación en el texto de Cervantes. Al final del cuento, Borges expresa su creencia de que el Quijote es ahora un *palimpsesto* donde se podrían exhumar los rastros de la escritura de Menard. Sin embargo, Borges afirma que solamente un "segundo Pierre Menard" sería capaz de tal empresa. Ese segundo Menard ya existe y es el propio Borges[15]. Al ofrecer una vindicación de la obra de Menard, Borges da continuidad al diálogo interminable que es el proceso de interpretación.

—Erick Felinto
University of California, Los Angeles

Notas

[1] Bitov, Andrei. *Le Professeur de Simmétrie* (Prepodavatel' Simmetrii). Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

[2] Me refiero naturalmente al personaje Jorge de Burgos, que Eco imagina como el monje ciego guardián de los secretos de la biblioteca monasterial (Eco 1980).

[3] En Descartes, recordemos, la unidad y la realidad del sujeto son garantizadas por la duda hiperbólica, por el movimiento del pensar: "pienso, luego existo". Por medio del *cogito*, el sujeto pensante establece su identidad en un acto autoreferencial, donde la razón es soberana e infalible. En los cuentos de Borges, los personajes son frecuentemente decepcionados o conducidos al error por sus propios poderes de raciocinio. Es lo que le sucede, por ejemplo, al detective Lönnrot de "La muerte y la brújula".

[4] Borges acompaña cierta tendencia de la literatura moderna de asimilar conceptos de origen religioso o metafísico para transportarlos a un ámbito profano-estético. W. Menninghaus (7) describe la ocurrencia de ese proceso en Walter Benjamin y lo designa por el término "säkularisierende Aneignung" 'apropiación secularizada', expresión que puede ser perfectamente aplicada a Borges. George Steiner, a la vez, percibe la importancia de ese proceso en Benjamin, Borges y Kafka, en cuyas obras se pueden detectar los grandes temas de la especulación mística, "changed into model and metaphor" (66). Sin embargo, la conversión de lo místico y de lo filosófico a lo estético no implica el vaciamiento completo de esos dominios en Borges. Un ejemplo de estudio que contempla los tres elementos es el libro de Roland Quilliot, *Borges et l´Etrangeté du Monde*.

[5] La propia Massuh no resiste a la tentación de concluir su ensayo por medio de una posible abertura a la metafísica: "Casi con desenfado, Borges insiste en estetizar una dimensión que para otros es sagrada. Acaso se tiende con ello una trampa así mismo: detrás de ella se descubre una acendrada necesidad de despojamiento que es quizá algo más que una mera exigencia linguística. Que esto permanezca también en el ámbito del misterio" (239).

[6] El dios de los gnósticos es un dios sin identidad, el *teos agnostos* (dios desconocido). Es el dios que busca el sacerdote Tzinacán de *La Escritura de Dios*. "den namenlosen Gott der Gnostiker, den Gott, der sich in den Dingen, z. B. im Tigerfell, in der Rose oder dem Rad veräußerlichte" 'el dios sin nombre de los gnósticos, el dios que se oculta en las cosas, por ejemplo, en la piel del tigre, en la rosa o en la rueda' (Niggestich 239, *traducción del autor*).

[7] Monegal fue el primero en percibir que Borges propone una poética de la lectura. (1980). Pero más que poética de la lectura, creemos que se debería hablar de una poética de la *apropiación o asimilación*.

[8] Es importante percibir la diferencia entre el Borges autor del cuento "Pierre Menard. . . ." y el Borges *personaje de su propio cuento*, que intenta la interpretación de la obra de Menard. Aquí me refiero a este último.

[9] No parece ser mera coincidencia que todos los nombres de los intérpretes de Menard comiencen con la misma letra: **B**orges, b. **B**acourt, c. **B**agnoregio y m. H. **B**achelier.

[10] La distinción entre *filología*, *exégese* y *hermenéutica* no es de ningún modo clara y precisa. Para muchos estudiosos, los términos son sinónimos, al paso que para otros, como G. Gusdorf, guardan importantes diferencias entre sí. Sigo este último cuando caracteriza la actividad exegética-filológica como establecimiento del texto historico y literal. Proceso inferior, por lo tanto, al de la hermenéutica, entendida como aproximación a la comprensión global del texto, donde la búsqueda del sentido implica incluso las inflexiones producidas por el intérprete en su objeto de estudio. En efecto, uno puede afirmar con Dilthey que el concepto de ciencia hermenéutica nace solamente con el protestantismo. La hermenéutica moderna y sus desdoblamientos fenomenológicos (Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur...) es tributaria directa de los inmensos desarollos producidos por el protestantismo y el pensamiento romántico en el arte de la interpretación.

[11] Durante los siglos XVI y XVII, la búsqueda de una nueva lengua universal se hizo una obsesión recurrente de la filosofía y de la literatura. Uno puede encontrar una extensa introducción a las ideas linguísticas de Descartes, Leibniz, Wikins y Lull en la obra de Gerhard Strasser, 1988. Ver también Umberto Eco, 1993. La tardía empresa de Georges Boole (fines del siglo XIX) igualmente representa un intento de desarollar una lengua del puro pensamiento, lógica y universal. Es la "lengua" que nuestras computadoras hoy emplean (Eco 1993, 335). Borges escribió un importante ensayo sobre Wilkins - "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins" - incluído en *Otras Inquisiciones* (1951). En el prólogo a *El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan*, conjunto de cuentos donde se incluye "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote", Borges afirma claramente la unidad de los textos de Menard: "la nómina de escritos que le atribuyo no es demasiado divertida pero no es arbitraria; es un *diagrama de su historia mental*" (Borges 429, *el subrayado es nuestro*).

[12] El ejemplo de Gusdorf es tan sugestivo que cabe preguntar si no habrá leído el cuento de Borges.

[13] Hay un aforismo de Nietzsche en *Also Sprach Zarathustra* que justifica plenamente la tésis de m. Bachelier: "unbekümmert, spöttisch, gewalttätig - so will uns die Weisheit: sie ist ein Weib, sie liebt immer nur Kriegsmann" 'despreocupados, bromeadores, violentos - así nos quiere la sabiduría: es hembra y no ama sino a guerreros' (*traducción del autor*) apud Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse mit der Streitschrift zur Genealogie der Moral*. Baden-Baden: Insel, 1984, 296. Otra vez se trata de establecer el conjunto de

interpretaciones, válidas o desviantes, que dan cuenta de la recuperación del sentido de la obra de Menard.

[14] Sobre el tema del "precursor" véase el conocido ensayo "Kafka y sus precursores", en *Otras inquisiciones.*

[15] En una nota final al texto, Borges recuerda los manuscritos de Menard: "sus cuadernos cuadriculados, sus negras tachaduras, sus peculiares símbolos tipográficos y su letra de insecto" (450). Quien haya visto manuscritos del puño de Borges va a reconocer aquí una descripción de los hábitos de escrita del propio autor del cuento (Borges, Miguel de Torre). M. Lafon (60) también nota que la obra de Menard principia en 1899, en el mismo año del nacimiento de Borges.

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Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda: ¿Historia occidental?

The profound influence of classical tradition — as recovered, appropriated and re-invented by authors of the Renaissance — upon texts produced in relation to the initial phases of the encounter, conquest and colonization of America has been well documented. Beginning with the journals of Columbus, in which the *locus amoenus* of classical antiquity appeared within an actual historical context — that of the recently encountered Caribbean islands — the presence of a literary and/or historical subtext providing the interpretive and, consequently, structural basis for this and subsequent works has been clearly demonstrated. At the same time, studies such as those undertaken by María Rosa Lida de Malkiel and Stephen Gilman have pointed out the presence of the "chivalric novel" (a popular literary genre of the sixteenth century) as an underlying text in such early chronicles as Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España*, while the presence of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* has been illustrated in such "historical-epics" of the Conquest as the *Araucana* by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga.[1] More recently, Roberto González Echeverría has been so bold as to suggest that this phenomenon is peculiar to Latin America as it is rooted in the confluence of literary works and historical documents brought about by the encounter between the "Old World" and the "New". In this sense, the "discovery" of America initiated a syncretic process that eventually lead to the

creation of a body of literary works, each possessing a set of characteristics that distinguish them from their European progenitors.

Surprisingly, far less has been said about the prolonged effect that contact with the "New World" had upon the established literary canons of contemporary Europe, particularly those of the Spanish Golden Age. In this article, I will suggest but one possible approach to the study of such a phenomenon while limiting myself to the analysis and comparison of two texts that illustrate one type of influence that the reality of America had upon authors of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain. The texts to be considered are the initial chapters of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's last novel, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, historia septentrional* (1617) and a "novelistic interlude" found in the *Mexicana,* a little known epic-poem dedicated to the heroism of Hernán Cortés composed by Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega and published in 1594.[2]

The basis of my argument hinges upon several important ideas that I will develop throughout this brief monograph: (1) That Cervantes cultivated a persistent interest in the New World and actively pursued the notion of traveling to America; (2) that Cervantes, as recorded in his Viaje al Parnaso, was not only familiar with, but admired the work of Lobo Lasso de la Vega; and (3) that the thematic and structural similarity that is to be found upon comparing the segments of the two works in question.

Upon careful observation, two distinct phases appear in which a textual symbiosis occurred between the literature produced "on-sight" in relation with the encounter and conquest of America (itself based upon classical models), and the ensuing works of the same nature created in Spain.[3] Initially, the "discovery" of marvelous isles inhabited by noble yet innocent savages served to confirm not only the quasi-

scientific theories of such ancient scholars as Pliny and Aristotle, but at the same time provided the tangible, historical basis for the resurgence of what was until then considered fantastic (thus inverisimilar) literature — inspired mainly through the re-elaboration of mythological and "historical" works of the Greco-Roman tradition. One reference to such literature is expressed in the "Prólogo al lector" included in the *Novelas ejemplares* in which Cervantes invokes the *Persiles* "que atreve a competir con Heliodoro, si ya por atrevido no sale con las manos en la cabeza." The reason that the author of the *Persiles* could compete with the work of such a venerated author of the classical tradition (whose texts were considered verisimilar at the time) and believe himself to be superior is, as I shall demonstrate, in part due to the fact that Cervantes had access to and exploited an array of creative possibilities as incorporated in the literature produced as a result of the discovery of America.

Paradoxically, then, with the "discovery" of America, what once existed as an ou-*topos* (i.e. a nonexistent place) revealed itself as a reality within which this literature could find a world of possibilities — an *eu-topos* (the best of worlds). In this context, the mermaids, cyclopes, cannibals and myriad other creatures that were until 1492 relegated to the time and space of Homer's epic and Aristotle's "torrid zone," did indeed exist. Once the inhabitants of a long lost continent preserved through Western literary tradition, they were quite literally re-discovered (or re-invented) by early explorer-chroniclers such as Columbus, Pigafetta and Vespucci. Such a projection of Western tradition as applied to the interpretation of a foreign reality produced a reflection whose rays were thrown back upon the conquering civilization providing, in turn, an until then untapped source for Western artistic creation. This reflection is most clearly demonstrated by the influence of literary

works dealing with aspects of the discovery and conquest of the New World — composed by Peninsular, Creole and Mestizo authors — upon the works of literary figures of the Golden Age such as Lope de Vega and Miguel de Cervantes. During this third phase of assimilation, the reality of the New World and its marvelous inhabitants, along with the inevitable heroic encounters between Europeans and Indians, provided the material for literary creation of this nature. Thus, the influence of America, although initially limited to chronicles and epic poems, gradually worked itself into other genres, providing the Western imagination with an encyclopedia of creative possibilities. In this reflection, the initial impressions of the Spaniards as recorded in texts such as that by Ercilla previously mentioned, served as models for authors in contemporary Spain, who incorporated their marvelous contents into the prevailing canons of the age, or forged new ones, as in the case of Cervantes.

As evidenced by the references to America in a number of Cervantes' works, his fascination with "... las Indias, refugio y amparo de los desesperados de España, iglesia de los alzados, salvoconducto de los homicidas, palo y cubierta de los jugadores a quien llaman ciertos los peritos en el arte, añagaza general de mujeres libres, engaño com˙n de muchos y remedio particular de pocos" (*Novelas*, 301), is clearly demonstrated. On the historical level, the fact that Cervantes seriously aspired to emigrate to the New World is apparent in a petition directed to Philip II in which he manifests this ambition:

> Pide y suplica humildemente cuanto puede a V.M. sea servido de hacerle merced de un oficio en las Indias de los tres o cuatro que al presente están vacos [sic]... que con qualquier de estos

> oficios que V.M. le haga merced la recibirá; porque es hombre hábil y suficiente y benemérito para que V.M. le haga merced; porque su deseo es continuar siempre en el servicio y acabar su vida, como lo han hecho sus antepasados que en ello recibirá muy gran bien y merced. (cited in Carrilla, 12)

The sources for Cervantes' knowledge of the New World, as expressed in various literary works, most assuredly were those chronicles written by official Spanish historians such as Francisco López de Gómara as well as other, less authoritative texts, such as Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales*, whose first book was published in 1609. Significantly, in their introduction to the *Persiles*, Rodolfo Schevill and Adolfo Bonilla argue that the work of El Inca Garcilaso, a mestizo of royal Spanish and Incan ancestry, constitutes a definitive thematic source for Cervantes' final novel. They point out that:

> Rasgos hay en los dos primeros libros, como luego veremos, para los cuales tuvo en cuenta Cervantes verosímilmente las costumbres de los indígenas de América. El historiador a quien más recuerda es el inca Garcilaso de la Vega, que publicó, en vida de Cervantes, la Primera Parte de los *Comentarios Reales* que tratan de el origen de los Incas, Reyes que fueron del Perú, de su idololatría, leyes y govierno en paz y en guerra, etc. (IX)

Nevertheless, more recent studies, such as that of Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce, have tended to reject *Los comentarios reales* as a source of certain aspects of the *Persiles*, arguing that other, earlier texts contain the same

information (in the form of references to Amerindian culture) as that provided by the Inca Garcilaso.[4] I do not believe, however, that the possibility of America as an influential factor in the first part of Cervantes' novel should be completely dismissed until another text — itself an indirect product of the conquest — which shares many essential characteristics with this part of the *Persiles* is brought to light. As I shall to demonstrate, the "novelistic interlude" contained in the *Mexicana* by Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega, presents a series of features that anticipate certain fundamental characteristics of the beginning of Cervantes' novel both in content, structure and theme.

To be sure, in this type of comparative study, in which the influence of one text has purportedly acted upon another, it is essential to demonstrate that the latter author (Cervantes) was acquainted with the work of the former (Lasso de la Vega). Fortunately, in this case such a familiarity is easily confirmed. In his *Viaje al Parnaso*, Cervantes not only mentions Lobo Lasso within the body of the work itself, but honors the poet by placing him in a heavenly carriage occupied by other literary dignities:

> Passan volando la empinada sierra,
> las nuves tocan, llegan casi al cielo,
> y alegres pisan la famosa tierra.
> Con este mismo honroso y grave zelo,
> Bartolomé de Mola y Gabriel Laso
> llegaron a tocar del monte el suelo.
> (*Viaje* 81:14-18)

It must be pointed out, however, that Lobo Lasso's literary endeav-

ors were quite varied, as he composed not only epic-poetry but lyric verse, drama and panegyrical treatises. His first recorded work is the *Primera parte del Romancero y trajedias* (Alcalá, 1587), followed by the *Primera parte de Cortés valeroso y Mexicana* (Madrid, 1588), the work that provides the basis for his *Mexicana* (Madrid, 1594). These works were followed by a book of lyric poetry, the *Manojuelo de romances nuevos* (Barcelona, 1601, segunda parte Zaragoza, 1603) and the *Elogios en loor de los tres famosos varones: Don Jaime, rey de Aragón; Don Fernando Cortés, marqués del Valle, y Don Alvaro de Bazán, marqués de Santa Cruz* (Zaragoza, 1601). Unfortunately, his last work, the *Segunda parte del Manojuelo de Romances nuevos y otras obras* (Zaragoza, 1603) has been lost. Although Lobo Lasso is the author of so varied an opus, the figure of Cortés stands out as that which receives most of the poet's attention for, as is evident from the author's bibliography, the Spanish captain provides the subject for half of Lasso's surviving works.

The *Mexicana* is a little known work that I believe to be representative of one type of literature that — after having found its inspiration in texts directly related to the conquest of America — influenced literary production of Spain's Golden Age. Obviously, the immediate Spanish prototype for this work is Alonso de Ercilla's *Araucana*, first published in 1561. As has been pointed out, it was originally the influence of such epic poems of the Italian Renaissance such as Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516) that provided the structural and thematic basis for this and other similar works. Ercilla, however, is the first to utilize this traditional form of "fantastic literature" as a vehicle to commemorate the reality of such a marvelous encounter as that between the Spaniards and the Araucanians. The *Araucana's* immediate acceptance in the literary community of sixteenth-century Spain is attested to by its numerous

editions, additions and imitations. It is by no means insignificant then, that "don Alonso de Ercilla" himself provided the *aprobación* of Lasso's work, thus, it could be argued, incorporating it into a nascent genre that is best described as epic-poetry of the Renaissance tradition elaborated upon a historical model. Ercilla writes of the *Mexicana:*

> Yo he visto este libro, intitulado
> *Mexicana*, de Gabriel Lasso de la Vega,
> que se le ha dado otra vez licencia para
> imprimir, y asimismo lo añadido, y
> digo que se le puede dar mejor ahora,
> por haberle mejorado con más cuidado y
> curiosidad. (Lobo Lasso 3)

Although the content of this approbation does not directly link the *Mexicana* with Ercilla's epic, it does suggest that as an author of a similar work and the narrator of Spain's bloody contest with the Araucanians was the most appropriate candidate to evaluate Lasso's composition.

Lobo Lasso's poem, dedicated to the prowess of Fernando Cortés and the glorification of Imperial Spain is, to a certain extent, an expression of the prevailing Renaissance ideology in the sense that it addresses the achievements of an individual and his nation. The metric form of the poem (the *octava real)* is the standard meter of the Renaissance epic and consequently that preferred by such poets as Ariosto and Ercilla. Its content is not that based upon mythical heroes of ancient history and their adventures in non-existent places. On the contrary, the protagonist of the *Mexicana* is a recently deceased Spanish captain who conquered what only initially (due to lack of a geographical

referent) was interpreted to be an enchanted world.

In his *Manojuelo de romances,* Lobo Lasso (not surprisingly) derides those poets who, still engaged by an aesthetic based upon Greco-Roman models, sing praises to such ancient heroes as Scipio, Alexander and Hannibal instead of perpetuating the deeds of contemporary Spaniards:

> Vuestro negocio haréis,
> señores, en celebrarlos [españoles]
> pues versos con ellos
> quedarán perpetuados;
> porque llegando a tratar
> ahora de los Romanos,
> lo que dellos más se estima
> son los melones y gatos. (*Manojuelo* XVII)

Before entering into a detailed analysis of the two works in question, I believe that a cursory description of the genesis and characteristics of Lobo Lasso's work to be appropriate. The *Mexicana*, published in Madrid in 1594, constitutes the revision of a previous text entitled Cortés Valeroso and published in 1588. In his prologue to the former, Jerónimo Ramírez reminds the reader of the almost complete novelty of this version and, at the same time, presents a theory as to the recent inclusion of fantastic, or novelistic, interludes:

> La impresión de ahora es tan diferente de la pasada, que puede pasar por nueva, así en la disposición, como en lo que lleva añadido. Van en convenientes lugares algunas ficciones

> ingeniosas, sin las cuales pierden el ser y gusto las obras de poesía. No quiso antes usar de ellas el autor, por parecerle que de esta manera guardería mejor el rigor que pide la historia: despues acá, considerando de la importancia que es (mayormente a los que escriben metro) juntar lo dulce con lo provechoso, quiso tomar la licencia que se concede al poeta para fingir.... (XXVII)

It is a work whose theme was designated by both a personal interest on the part of the author and a request made by Don Martín Cortés, marqués del Valle, son of the Spanish conquistador who had died the year of Cervantes' birth. In the prologue to the Cortés Valeroso, Lasso de la Vega explains why he set out to write such a poem:

> El ser tan aficionado (y con justa razón) a los hechos y cosas de Fernando Cortés, y el entender ay en el mundo tantos de mi opinión con quien defender mi causa, ha sido la principal; justamente con la carta de don Martín Cortés, marqués del Valle, su hijo, de emprender cosa que si destas calidades careciera, se me pudiera atribuir sin disculpa a temeridad.... (Lasso XVI)

The historical sources for this epic surely were those included in the Hispania Victrix of Francisco López de Gómara, official biographer of Hernán Cortés. Lobo Lasso alludes to this in his Cortés Valeroso:

> Que ya Gómara, y otros, nos han dado
> entera relación de sus pisadas;

> y con estilo claro y levantado
> dellos han sido, y son manifestadas;
> a los quales remito los curiosos
> de saber más que aquestas cudiciosos. (Lasso XX)

However, it is precisely in the deviation from the "official story" of Gómara incorporated in one of the two "novelistic interludes" contained within the *Mexicana* that provides the source of comparison between Lobo Lasso's poem and the *Persiles* of Cervantes.

Canto XIV of the *Mexicana* begins with an abbreviated introduction in the form of an epigraph that resumes the narration that is to follow:

> Yendo Aguilar en seguimiento de un indio, le coge la noche en un espeso monte, por el cual discurriendo entra en una cueva de unos salteadores donde, con mucho riesgo de su vida, libra por la espada a Clandina de sus manos, a la cual tenían para sacrificar, habiendo valerosamente peleado y muerto muchos de ellos. (Lasso 106)

In the paragraphs that follow, I will resume the "novelistic interlude" contained in Lobo Lasso's poem, emphasizing those characteristics that serve to demonstrate its relationship with Cervantes' novel with the intention that upon presenting a similar outline of the initial chapters of the *Persiles*, the affinities become readily apparent. Because not only certain descriptive elements, but the structure and theme of the interlude as a whole are to be included in this comparative analysis, and owing to the fact that the *Mexicana* has been relegated to occupy bibliographies of the era (and is thus not readily known to contempo-

rary readers of Spanish literature of the period), a more detailed outline will be provided.

Canto XIV of the *Mexicana* begins, as do many poems of this nature, with an exhortation directed at the reader's sense of morality — in this case, a meditation upon the characteristics of true friendship between men. It is tied to the rest of the narration as the pretext for Aguilar's adventure is based upon the loss of his dear friend, Luzón, fatally wounded by unfriendly natives. This personal affront in turn, serves to introduce the Indian, described as an "alentado bárbaro," while at the same time presenting the theme of revenge as one of those to be encountered in this interlude.

After having rested during his search for Luzón, Aguilar is awakened from a terrifying dream in which he is startled by the apparition of a ferocious lion. Suddenly he notes "una pequeña luz no lejos vido / en un peñasco cóncavo y hundido" (107:10). This light emanates from a "seno cavernoso, prolongado, / que su cóncava entrada a austro inclina, / donde vio doce mozos desarmados, / en poner unas mesas ocupados" (107:11).[5] Inside the cave he discerns "grandes fuegos encendidos, / do cantidad de carne humana asaban" (107:12) while its entrance is covered by an "estrecha puerta [que] cerraba, con rollizas palancas rodeado" (107:13). The residents of this subterranean domain:

> De agudas flechas y arcos encorvados
> venían y de espadas, proveidos,
> de preseas los brazos ocupados,
> con tres jóvenes tristes, afligidos,
> que traían llorosos, maniatados,
> dando sollozos y ásperos gemidos:

a quien soltando el peso desataron
y las tiernas cabezas arrancaron. (107:14)

The unfortunate victims are quickly tied to "asadores, / con los desechos cuerpos juntamente" (107:15) while thirty more enter the cavern "con nuevo orgullo y presa nueva" also to be dedicated "al vano dios de hurtos que adoraban / y gran gente a su honor sacrificaban" (107:16). Finally, with "una graciosa bárbara [entran] otros veinte, / con joyas de valor que habían robado... / entre ellos repartieron lo hurtado, / concordes en que fuese la doncella / ofrecida a su dios, por ser tan bella" (107: 17). After indulging in an abundant feast centered around a huge, elaborately prepared and inverisimil table, the majority of the Indians fall asleep "quedándose sobremesa desarmados, / en vino y carne humana sepultados" (107:18). Meanwhile, the apparent leader of this ruthless band is introduced and his talents are described in detail:

Mas un dispuesto bárbaro inhumano,
gran adivino entre ellos y agorero
(seg˙n le celebraba el pueblo vano),
estimado por ˙nico estrellero,
que se llamaba el sabio Millolano,
en juventud certísimo flechero,
hábil en el usado sacrificio,
el cual de sacerdote hacía el oficio. (108:20)

He has been called to perform the sacrificial rite upon "la tristísima doncella / que, sollozando, al punto fue traída / con lamentable y trágica querella" (108:21). Without a moment's delay:

De pedernal sacó un cuchillo agudo
el arrogado bárbaro sangriento,
de la víctima hace ofrecimiento
a una imagen de oro, simulada,
que había en la cueva, en sangre rociada. (108:22)

Before he can commit the lethal blow, his victim persuades the priest that "el apartado mozo prisionero / que con ella los viente habían cogido / fuese, antes de su muerte, allí traído" (108:24). After being brought before the victim, the youth invokes the cruelty of the gods and promptly faints. Nevertheless, "por algunos bárbaros de aquellos, / foragidos, crueles, desgarrados, / fue del indio la joven desasida / y a las aras por víctima traída" (109:33).

To their surprise, the sacrifical rite is abruptly interrupted "cuando un ruido y voz extraña oyeron / que por la boca de la cueva entraba / y a todos su rigor amenazaba" (109:34). The voice is that of "Aguilar, que condolido, / de la joven a muerte condenada, / de detrás del peñasco había salido / ... quiso en un riesgo tal poner la vida / por que fuese la dama socorrida" (109:35). After having removed the sorcerer Millolano's arm with one blow, a terrible battle ensues in which the indigenous mob, described as: "la mísera canalla discuidada, / que repleta por tierra está durmiendo, / salta fuera de sí desacordada, / a las ausentes armas acudiendo" (109:38). The violent band "aferra el bastón grueso, nudoso, / quien de la ajena espada se aprovecha / quien de tizón rollizo más humoso, / quien del arco pintado y larga flecha" (109:39). As the battle ensues, Hipandro, along with twelve other captured Indians, happy to fight against "la dura opresión y tiranía" of the barbarous cannibals, help Aguilar to defeat the vicious throng.

In an important subtext included within the narration of the events, an angry "bárbaro" spies "una bella joven afligida / (que desde lejos el lidiar miraba), / con indignado rostro se acercaba" (110:47). He abducts the girl and takes her to "un cóncavo peñasco socovado, / apartado del trance peligroso, / do la metió..." (110:48). As it turns out, the vicious "bárbaro" has used this same cave to hide his treasure and consequently promises to return "a ofrecer, aunque es pobreza, / de aquel hombre atrevido [(Aguilar)] la cabeza" (110:49). Upon returning to the battle, her captor is fatally wounded by "una flecha veloz, que le rompía / el pecho, y por el suelo basqueando / rueda el gallardo mozo enamorado, / de la enemiga punta atrevesado" (111:50). Before expiring, he manages to return to the cave where his captive awaits. There, after a pathetic monologue, he dies. Meanwhile, the other Indians, recognizing their imminent defeat, "el lugar desamaparan y, corriendo, / por la cueva con paso diligente, / van en ciego tropel de ella saliendo" (111:57). Returning to the place of sacrifice, Aguilar finds the female victim and frees her. She expresses her eternal gratitude to the Spanish soldier and reveals her identity: "Clandina soy, señor, la desdichada / a quien vuestro valor y fortaleza / libró, en el monte espeso cavernoso, / del insolente Hirtano cauteloso" (112:62). She then describes how she and her lover, Hipandro, were abducted on the way to celebrate their marriage while "al pie de un verde mirto descansando" they were attacked and taken prisioner by twenty assailants.[6] Finally, Clandina explains how, "a aquesta oscura cueva nos trajeron / y ricas piezas de oro nos quitaron ... en que muriese yo todos vinieron, / y la cruel sentencia pronunciaron; / al sacrificio estaba yo aprestada, / cuando el favor llegó de vuestra espada" (112:67).

True to form, Aguilar asks the Indians where the gold is hidden,

and proceeds, led by "cierta guía", to the cave where the treasure is to be found. Upon entering the cave, they hear "una voz débil, lastimosa, / que flaca y tiernamente se quejaba" (113:70). They pause to listen to the lamentation in which the damsel is consoled only because she has conserved her honor: "Muero (aunque de esta suerte) consolada / con ver que, aunque cautiva y perseguida, / ha sido mi limpieza conservada / y siempre por los dioses defendida" (113:73). But, sadly, Aguilar and his guide "la bárbara toparon desdichada, / en su espumosa sangre revolcada" (112:74). They immediately bury the body and continue the search for the treasure which, upon discovery, is returned to its rightful owners. The noble Aguilar "sólo un alfanje de oro, bien formado, / tomó, y dos esmeraldas, no labradas" (113:77). The interlude ends when Aguilar meets a garrison of ten Spanish soldiers who had been sent to rescue him and all return to the Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz.

Following this cursory description of the "novelistic interlude" contained within Lobo Lasso's *Mexicana*, I shall resume those aspects of the initial chapters of the *Persiles* which appear to have been derived from the poem. Obviously, it is the image of the "mazmorra" that first brings to mind the *Mexicana* for, in both of the works, it is that which serves as the axis around which the action of the episode revolves and in the case of the *Persiles*, the point of departure for the novel. Cervantes' novel which begins — as most Baroque novels do — *in medias res*, immediately presents us with as familiar situation:

> Voces daba el bárbaro Corsicurbo a la estrecha boca de una profunda mazmorra, antes sepultura que prisión de muchos cuerpos vivos que en ella estaban sepultados. Y aunque su terrible y espantoso estruendo cerca y lejos se escuchaba, de

> nadie eran entendidas articuladamente las razones que pronunciaba, sino de la miserable Cloelia, a quien sus desventuras en aquella profundidad tenían encerrada. (51)[7]

Corsicurbo asks Cloelia to send up a male victim, bound and gagged, as well as requesting her to "mira bien si, entre las mujeres de la pasada presa, hay alguna que merezca nuestra compañía..." (51). This request immediately brings to mind the *Mexicana* for, as will be recalled, it is due to her beauty that Clandina is to be sacrificed to the gods. However, in this case, the women are to serve a different purpose among the "bárbaros" of these islands. Upon contemplating his unfortunate circumstance with a stoic attitude, the young victim thanks God as "bien querría no morir desesperado a lo menos, porque soy cristiano; pero mis desdichas son tales que me llaman, y casi fuerzan a desearlo" (52). Unlike Lasso's heroine, who laments her fate and denounces the inequitable treatment received from her gods, Cervantes' character, (true to the characteristics of Baroque literature inspired by the doctrines of the Counter Reformation), maintains faith in his God and apparently prefers to die than to remain in the hands of such gentiles.

Cervantes, conscious of the importance of verisimilitude espoused by such philosophers as Pinciano, is quick to point out that "ninguna de estas razones fue entendida de los bárbaros, por ser dichas en diferente lenguaje que el suyo" (52). It should be mentioned that Lobo Lasso, although he never mentions the question of communication between Indian and Spaniard, chooses Jerónimo de Aguilar, a sailor who had been shipwrecked off the coast of Mexico for several years (and thus conversant in the native language), as the protagonist of his interlude. In this manner, both authors are careful to maintain a level of verisimili-

tude in their works, albeit it may be argued that the *Persiles*, as a genuine product of the author's imagination does not, unlike the *Mexicana*, purport to represent an actual historical encounter.[8]

The captors close the cell with "una gran piedra" and take their captive to the coast "donde tenían una balsa de maderos atados unos con otros con fuertes bejucos y flexibles mimbres" (52) in which they sail to another island. Although the "mazmorra" described by Cervantes appears to be a man-made construction, it recalls the "caverna" found in the *Mexicana* in several aspects: both are covered by an enormous stone, both serve as the prison and place of sacrifice for the victims and, as previously mentioned, they both serve as the focal point within which the narration develops.

In an effort to frighten the youth, one of the native captors "asió de un grandísimo arco que en la balsa estaba, y poniendo en el una desmesurada flecha, cuya punta era de pedernal, con mucha presteza le flechó..." (53). Although this is only the first occasion in which native weapons are described, they immediately recall not the arms of the residents of the Northern Hemisphere, but, as has been demonstrated by Schevill and Bonilla, those of pre-Colombian America. The bow with a flint-headed arrow is also, not surprisingly, one of several weapons common to both the natives of the *Mexicana* and the *Persiles*. The savage archer:

> ...sabiendo que no había de ser aquel el género de muerte con que le habían de quitar la vida, hallando la belleza del mozo piedad en la dureza de su corazón, no quiso darle dilatada muerte, tiéndole siempre encarada la flecha al pecho, y así arrojó de sí el arco, y llegándose al él, por señas, como mejor

pudo, le dio a entender que no quería matarle. (53)

Suddenly, the small craft is engulfed in a storm and the youth is left alone to fend for himself, tied to the timbers of the boat, when he is miraculously rescued by sailors from a ship anchored off the shore of one of the numerous islands. The benevolent captain orders the sailors to remove his wet clothing and "le vistiesen otros enjutos y limpios, y le hiciesen descansar y dormir" (54).

In chapter two, an important sub-narration is introduced in Cervantes' novel in which, while regaining his strength, the youth is startled by the "congojosos suspiros y unas angustidadas lamentaciones que a sus oídos llegaron, a su parecer, salidos de entre unas tablas de otro apartamento que junto al suyo estaba" (54). It will be recalled that the "novelistic interlude" in the *Mexicana* is also structured around two narrations, and both are similar to those found in the *Persiles* in that they deal with the tragic story of a heroine; in Lasso's poem that of the incarcerated damsel and in this case, that of Auristela.

The youth immediately asks to hear the story of this sad maiden for, in his opinion, "las desgracias y trabajos cuando se comunican suelen aliviarse..." (55). She proceeds to tell "en cifra" of her sad fate while the youth listens attently from his cabin. As it turns out, she is the maiden of a damsel:

> ...de tanta hermosura, que entre las que hoy viven en el mundo, y entre aquellas que puede pintar en la imaginación el más agudo entendimiento, puede llevar la ventaja. Su discreción iguala a su belleza, y sus desdichas a su discreción y a su hermosura. Su nombre es Auristela. (56)

She explains how Auristela was purchased by the son of the king of Denmark, captain of the ship, who planned to make her his wife. "Pero ella se defendía, diciendo no ser posible romper un voto que tenía hecho de guardar virginidad toda su vida, y que no pensaba quebrarle en ninguna manera, si bien la solicitasen promesas o la amenazasen muertes" (56). Although the theme of chastity is a recurrent one in the literature of this period, it is worth recalling, for sake of comparison, that the heathen damsel found dead in the sub-narration of the *Mexicana*, is also concerned about this Christian virtue when, towards the end of the sub-interlude, she gives thanks to her gods that, if nothing else, her honor has been preserved.

Unfortunately, before Auristela's vows could be put to the test, "sucedió que, andando [...] por la ribera del mar, solazándose, no como esclava, sino como reina, llegaron unos bajeles de cosarios, y la robaron y la llevaron no se sabe adónde" (56). In a similar fashion, Clandina and Hipandro were overtaken by a group of savages and brought to the cave where they were rescued by Aguilar. According to the maiden, Auristela was apprehended by several barbarians who:

> ...andan por todos estos mares, ínsulas y riberas, robando o comprando las más hermosas doncellas que hallan, para traerlas por granjería a vender a esta ínsula, donde dicen que estamos, la cual es habitada de unos bárbaros, gente indómita y cruel, los cuales tienen entre sí por cosa inviolable y cierta, persuadidos, o va del demonio, o va de un antiguo hechicero a quien ellos tienen por sapientísimo varón que de entre ellos ha de salir un rey que conquiste y gane gran parte del mundo; este rey que esperan no saben quien ha de ser, y para saberlo,

> aquel hechicero le dio esta orden: que sacrificasen todos los hombres que a su ínsula llegasen...Tambien les mandó que tuviesen en la isla todas las doncellas que pudiesen o comprar o robar, y que la más hermosa dellas se la entregasen luego al bárbaro cuya sucesión valerosa prometía la bebida de los polvos. Estas doncellas compradas o robadas son bien tratados dellos, que sólo en esto muestran no ser bárbaros, y las que compran, son a subidísimos precios, que los pagan en pedazos de oro sin cuño y en preciosísimas perlas, de que los mares de las riberas destas islas abundan; y a esta causa, llevados deste interes y ganancia, muchos se han hechos corsarios y mercaderes. (57)

The presence of a sorcerer who decides the fate of the unlucky captives immediately recalls an analogous situation in the *Mexicana,* in which Millolano, the "gran estrellero" is responsible for the decision to sacrifice Clandina. While in Lasso's interlude her attempted sacrifice is due to Clandina's exceptional beauty, Cervantes modifies the situation in the *Persiles,* for as we have seen, the most beautiful maiden (i.e. Auristela) is to marry and consequently engender a superior race. It is the captive males, not females, who are to be put to death in Cervantes' novel.

Arnaldo's plan is to sell this poor creature to the "bárbaros" so she can act as a spy and determine whether Auristela is being held captive by the natives. The wretched girl "calló en diciendo esto, y al mancebo se le atrevesó un nudo en la garganta, pegó la boca con las tablas, que humedeció con copiosas lágrimas..." (58). Suddenly, Taurisa is called on deck by the captain, surely to be sent to the island to investigate

Auristela's whereabouts. Upon talking with the son of the King of Denmark, it turns out that the náufrago is:

> Periandro, de nobilísimos padres nacido, y al par de mi nobleza corre mi desventura y mis disgracias, las cuales por ser tantas no conceden ahora lugar para contársela. Esa Auristela que buscas, es una hermana mía que también yo ando buscando que por varios acontecimietos, ha un año que nos perdimos. (59)

After this confession, he proposes to the captain that he, not Taurisa, be sent because "...ninguna persona hará esta diligencia tan bien como yo, pues mi edad, mi rostro, el interés que se me sigue, juntamente con el conocimiento que yo tengo de Auristela, me está incitando a aconsejarme que tome sobre mis hombros esta empresa" (60). The captain accepts this proposal and proceeds to outfit Periandro "de muchos y ricos vestidos de que venía proveído por si hallaba a Auristela, vistió a Periando, que quedó, al parecer, la más gallarda y hermosa mujer que hasta entonces los ojos humanos habían visto..." (60). It is precisely at this point where the narration of Cervantes' last novel appears to become indebted not to Lobo Lasso's poem, but to those Byzantine and Chivalric novels so in vogue at the time. Nevertheless, it must be recalled that the *Mexicana* has provided the basis (in terms of detail, structure and theme) for the beginning of his *Persiles*.

It is suitable, while concluding, to point out that the relationship between Cervantes' interpretation of the Chivalric novel as demonstrated by a passage from the *Quijote*, the substance of Lasso's poem and the *Persiles* is not as disparate as one might assume. In fact, Schevill and

Bonilla posit that, indeed, the following passage of the *Quijote* is a direct reference to what would become the *Persiles*:

> Dixo — escribe — que, con todo quanto mal avía dicho de tales libros (de caballerías), hallava en ellos vna cosa buena, que era el sujeto que ofrecían para que vn buen entendimiento pudiesse mostrarse en ellos, porque davan largo y espacioso campo por donde sin empacho alguno pudiesse correr la pluma, describiendo naufragios, tormentas, recuentros y batallas; pintando vn captain valeroso, con todas las partes que para ser tal se requieren... Pintando, ora vn lamentable y trágico sucesso, aora vn alegre y no pensado acontecimiento: allí vna hermossísima dama, honesta, discreta y recatada, aquí vn caballero christiano, valiente y comedido; aculla vn desaforado bárbaro fanfarrón, acá vn príncipe Cortés, valeroso y bien mirado;...ya puede mostrarse astrólogo, ya cosmógrafo excelente... (cited in Schevill y Bonilla, VII)

I too believe that this passage provides a cursory description of that which will become the *Persiles* and would hasten to emphasize that in this synopsis of Cervantes' last novel appear those attributes that immediately recall the literature produced in relation with the encounter and conquest of America, notably those found in the *Mexicana* of Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega. In this sense, it may be argued that the "discovery" of America initiated a syncretic process that eventually lead to the creation of a body of hybrid literary works, each possessing a set of characteristics that distinguish them from their European progenitors. It is not suprising that this phenomenon occurs in the

works of authors of Cervantes's generation, as certain Baroque aesthetics (fascination with the exotic, the primitive and the bizarre) are well represented by the objects, flaura and fauna encountered in the Indies. Indeed, upon careful observation, two distinct phases appear in which a textual symbiosis occurred between the literature produced "on-sight" in relation with the encounter and conquest of America (itself based upon classical models), and the ensuing works of the same nature created in Spain, a construction that could be compared with certain structural preoccupations of the Baroque such as the novel within the novel (the *Quijote*) or a painting within a painting (Velázquez's *Las Meninas*).

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Notes

[1] I refer the reader to the articles cited by these authors found in the bibliography.

[2] The relationship between these two texts was first pointed out by Professor Carroll B. Johnson during a conversation regarding the possible motifs belonging to the pastoral novel as evidenced in Lobo Lasso's poem.

[3] Works belonging to the first category are, among others, those composed by Columbus (and transcribed by Las Casas), Ercilla, Díaz del Castillo and Cortés himself, while those of the second category include the works of López de Gómara, Lobo Lasso de la Vega, Illescas, Jovio etc.

[4] It is important to mention that according to Schevill and Bonilla, who are the original proponents of the "pre-Colombian connection," other possible sources for Cervantes' novel are: *Los amores de Clitofonte y Leucipe*, by Aquiles Tacio (published in Spanish as: *Historia de los amores de Clareo y Florisea* {1552}); the voyage of Zeni, *Viaggio del magnifico Messer Piero Quirino, Gentilhuomo*

vinitiano, nel quale...incorre in uno horribile &. spauentoso naufragio, del quale alla fine con diversi accedenti campato, arriva nella Norue &. Suetia, Regni Settentrionali; Olao Magno, *Opera breve, la quale demonstra e dechiara ouero da il modo facile de intendere la charta ouer delle terre frigigissime di Settentrione, etc.* (Venetia, 1539) and the *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Roma, 1555). A more probable influence is to be found in the *Historia delle genti e della natura delle cose settentrionali da Olao Magno Gotho, arcivescovo di Vpsala, etc.* (Venetia 1565). They are careful to point out that "ha de notarse que Olao Magno no es un historiador verídico, y que toma sin escr˙pulo muchas noticias de los clásicos (Estrabón, Plinio y otros), sin olvidar a los historiadores de Indias" (XVIII-XXV).

[5] The youths who are occupied in setting a large table immediately remind us of Ercilla's *Araucana,* in which a similar (in the sense that it is inverisimilar) scene is described by the poet

[6] The image of the "mirto" which serves as gentle solace for the young lovers immediately recalls not only poems of the Greco-Latin tradition (Virgil and Ovid) but the genre of the Pastoral Novel (such as Montemayor's *Diana*) as well.

[7] This and all other citations of the *Persiles* are taken from Juan Bautistia Avalle-Arce's edition as cited in the bibliography.

[8] In his *Filosofía antigua poética,* Alonso López Pinciano reminds authors that "las ficciones que no tienen imitación y verosimilitud no son fábulas, sino disparates, como algunas de las que antiguamente llamaron milesias, agora libros de caballería, los cuales tienen acontecimientos fuera de toda buena imitación y semejanza a verdad" (Cited in Schevill & Bonilla XVII).

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Metafiction in Latin American Narrative: The Case for Brazil or If Brás Cubas were here today, what would he say about Spanish American fiction?

The argument I'd like to make in this essay is, first, that Brazilian narrative is significantly different, in terms of its development, from its better-known Spanish American cousin and, second, that this difference is largely an issue of a particular kind of self-consciousness, the kind that contemplates not only the process by which a text comes into being but its relationship to reality and to truth. I'd like to suggest, then, that what we know critically as metafiction, the text that is about its own making, has characterized Brazilian narrative much more than is the case in Spanish America, where, though first-person narrative has a prodigious history,[1] it is not practiced in quite the same way as it has been in Brazil, where, I believe, we can think of metafiction as one of the defining characteristics of its narrative tradition. Further, I would like to propose that, since 1880, Brazilian narrative has been characterized by a more or less continuous cultivation of the text that self-consciously discusses its own creation and epistemological status, its own ability to represent, depict or be the truth. What I'll try to show in this study is that while the two traditions are often lumped together under the all too vague rubric of Latin American narrative, they are not the same, and that this metafictive tradition is more pronounced in Brazil than in

Spanish America, where it doesn't really become established until the great "nueva novela" of the 1960s. Finally, I will suggest that this tradition of critically self-conscious narration begins with Machado de Assis, one of the greatest writers ever to emerge from Latin America and a writer whose innovative brilliance has influenced the development of Brazilian narrative down to the present day.

As alluded to in my title, the particular Machadoean text I'd like to concentrate on is *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (or *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, as it's known in English), the 1880 text that is widely thought to mark the beginning of Machado's second, and most famous, phase, the period in which he achieved works of masterpiece status in both the novel form and in the short story.

But as we reread the *Memórias Póstumas* in a larger, more international context, we begin to appreciate it as a most singular work, one that has no counterpart, chronologically speaking, in Spanish America (or in North America, for that matter) and that will not have until the time of Borges, a point that, as I'll try to demonstrate, has tremendous consequences for the development of narrative in Latin America. Of all *Epitaph*'s innovative features, however, its most outstanding is almost certainly its deceased but witty narrator/protagonist, Brás Cubas, a cannily self-conscious raconteur who, for my money, ranks as one of the most fascinating characters ever to grace the pages of Latin American literature, indeed, world literature. And, as even a cursory perusal of Machado's extensive bibliography shows, for a long time readers tended to regard Brás as Machado himself. This view has given way, of course, to the still prevailing concensus that the cynical and egoistic Brás Cubas does not speak for the real Machado de Assis, a man whose life seems the antithesis of all that Brás stands for. This is certainly the

current critical view and, as summed up by Prof. Sandra Cypess[2] and others, it is one to which I subscribe as well.

With one exception. What I mean is that although I feel in the main that Brás does not reflect or embody his creator's beliefs, there is one issue about which I believe Brás does speak for Machado. That issue, I feel, is Machado's desire, in 1880, to develop a new kind of writing, to create a new narrative, one that would have a different relationship with reality and that would also require a new kind of reader, someone able to understand that literature, as a function of language, was, as Borges would later demonstrate, pure artifice, a self-referential system of signs; it was not and could not be the reality it seemed to represent. Theoretically speaking, then, it seems clear that in 1880 and the writing of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, Machado leaves realism behind and, suddenly and dramatically, begins to write what I believe is essentially poststructural narrative, the kind of writing that questions the epistemological nature of language itself as well as its relationship to such fundamental concepts as truth, reality, and verisimilitude. This tendency becomes more pronounced in his later works, especially *Dom Casmurro* (1900), the novel widely judged to be his supreme masterpiece (and one whose plot turns on the problem of verisimilitude), but I believe this same revolutionary decision about the kind of narrative he would write is fully operational as early as 1880 and *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. To sum this up, then, if we can accept a comparative approach to the issue, we can see that the first Latin American "new narrative" really begins in Brazil, with Machado de Assis, in 1880.[3]

When I say this, please understand that I do not wish in any way to denigrate or demean the brilliance of the later occuring and better known Spanish American "Nueva Narrativa;" indeed, as a comparatist

and as a Latin Americanist I take pride in both my traditions and I feel that it only enhances our standing on the stage of world literature to be able to boast of not just one but two "new narratives," each with its own special characteristics. The Spanish American tradition, for example, so brilliantly represented by such masters as Borges, Cortázar and Fuentes, represents what we might think of as the epitome of structuralism, or of structuralist fiction,[4] while the Brazilian narrative tradition, beginning with Machado but running through such other luminaries as Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, Clarice Lispector, Guimarães Rosa, and Osman Lins, embodies the kind of thinking known as poststructuralism, where the problem of meaning is seen to be fundamental to the self-referential nature of language itself. For the "Nueva Narrativa" of Borges and the Spanish Americans, meaning thus becomes an issue of the structures that give form to their narratives, as exemplified in Borges's famous *Ficciones*, which can be approached as intricate but ultimately solveable semiotic puzzles. For the "Nova Narrativa" of such masters as Machado, Guimarães and Clarice, however, meaning becomes a more fluid and elusive issue, one not so much a function of structures but of the ambiguous play of words within and between them, the inescapable "différance," as Derrida would say, inherent in language. When we think of it in terms of Saussurian linguistics, then, one is tempted to say that the Spanish American new narrative tends to illustrate the power of the "langue," the system or structure, while the Brazilian new narrative tends to accentuate the endless self-referentiality and semantic fecundity of the "parole," the individual act of speech or (picking up on a motif basic, I think, to modern Brazilian narrative) what we might call the self-conscious writing of writing, a tradition that I see as coming straight out of

Machado de Assis and reaching its zenith in the poststructural "textes" of Clarice Lispector.

Through Brás Cubas, his "new narrative" advocate, then, Machado subtly but categorically rejects realism, the then prevailing narrative mode in both Brazil and Spanish America, and effects, in the narrative that we know as *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the emergence of a new kind of writing, one that questions its own operation as a sign system as well as its own veracity.[5] As I suggested above, the sardonic Brás, speaking from the hereafter and as manipulative as any self-conscious narrator I can think of, would commence a tradition that has continued more or less unbroken in Brazilian literature up to the present day, linking some of Brazil's most celebrated texts, including *Os Sertões, Macunaíma, As Memórias Sentimentais de João Miramar* and *Serafim Ponte Grande, Grande Sertão: Veredas, Água Viva, Avalovara,* and *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo,* just to name a few. Differ though they do in other respects, what these works have in common is a keen if disconcerting awareness of how, even in our day to day relations, the language we use to attempt to make sense of our lives ends up being a discourse about language, about how language both affects and effects our various realities, and about how we cannot get outside it; in short, these works, further exploring the basic theoretical problem set out in *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas,* continue to interrogate not only language's ontological status but its epistemological claims as well. I don't see quite this same philosophical orientation occurring in Spanish American narrative until the 1970s, especially in the works of Cabrera Infante and Severo Sarduy. After this point, however, it seems to me that the two narrative traditions, the Brazilian and the Spanish American, become more similar, with the Brazilian perhaps being distinguished

by a consistently ironic and parodic mode of self-conscious storytelling — features again fully consistent with what we find in *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*.

Parody, of course, is a critical issue long associated with Latin American literature. The late Emir Rodríguez Monegal was perhaps the first critic to point it out, writing about the importance of parody to the development and emancipation of literature in Brazil and Spanish America as early as the 1970s.[6]

Another scholar working in this same vein is Alfred Mac Adam, and it is with him that I would like now to enter into a bit of a critical dialogue. In one of Professor Mac Adam's lesser known but, to my mind, most interesting studies, the piece on Latin American literature he and Flora Schiminovich wrote for the collection of essays entitled *The Postmodern Movement*,[7] he and his coauthor attempt to deal comparatively with the narrative traditions of Brazil and Spanish America. Borrowing from Bakhtin the terms parody and stylization, and employing them in the context of Bakhtinian theory, Mac Adam and Schiminovich argue that up until the 1940s, the Spanish American novel was a relatively weak form (at least in comparison to the Spanish American lyric). Further, they feel that this situation came about because Spanish America had gone too far in appropriating the forms and techniques of European, and especially French, realism, a mode of expression that Mac Adam and Schiminovich believe was alien to the Spanish American situation. As they write, "The problem was that the devices of realism and naturalism were not suited to the re-creation of Spanish American reality. The result, with some exceptions, was a mass of well-intentioned but derivative texts, books whose models were all too clear ." (256).

Interestingly, however, Mac Adam and Schiminovich recognize that in Brazil, during the same period of time, that is, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, narrative had already begun to change and that the catalyst was none other than Machado de Assis, "... who," they declare, "inaugurated, with the publication of *As Memorias Postumas de Bras Cubas* (1880), the modern Latin American satiric novel." (256). Mac Adam and Schiminovich then go on to say that:

> Flying in the face of realism, Machado chose fantasy and has his novel narrated by a dead man. This use of the fantastic together with his decision to reduce character to stereotype and his presentation of society as a madhouse without walls set him apart from his contemporaries, both in Brazil and in Spanish America. (256)

Basically, I have no quarrel with these assertions, though I might quibble with the implication that *Epitaph* could or should be labeled a "satiric novel" for to do so seems to limit it more than is warranted. And while I might also question the argument that in this landmark novel Machado reduces characters to stereotypes and that he presents society as "a madhouse without walls," what I wholeheartedly concur with — and what I wish now to explore further — is the idea that Machado very deftly but very deliberately rejects if not realism per se then most of its basic aesthetic assumptions and that he opts instead to create a new kind of writing, a narrative that, in terms of its aesthetic underpinnings, speaks to itself, to its own reality as art (or artifice) and to its own status as a verbal construct. This, I think, was what Machado had in mind when, according to Afrânio Coutinho, he wrote, "A realidade é boa, o

Realismo é que não presta para nada"/"Reality is good; realism is what isn't worth anything" (Fitz, *Machado de Assis*, 113).

Now although as Maria Luisa Nunes argues, Machado may have used the term "realismo" to refer to what we normally think of as "naturalism" (Nunes, *The Craft of an Absolute Winner*, 8), the basic concern expressed here, I think, is that the intensely complex nature of human reality (Machado's "realidade," which, he says, is "boa," or "good") cannot be adequately expressed, or "re-presented," using the techniques of either "realism" or "naturalism," which, as artistic modes of expression, Machado derided as being too superficial and limited. The debateable point, however, is how Machado understood human reality to be; how did he define it? I'm of the opinion that Machado understood human reality — that is, the essence of human existence and being — to be essentially psycho-linguistic in nature, that it was a function of language, language spoken, as in social discourse, or unspoken, as in the silent mental flow of the mind, the latter finding brilliant expression in the famous chap. 55 of *Epitaph*, the one entitled "O Velho Diálogo de Adão e Eva"/"The Venerable Dialogue of Adam and Eve" and in which Brás and his lover, Virgília, "converse" literally without words, the reader being guided through their wordless (but not signless) "conversation" only by the punctuation used and by his or her expectations about what might be said by these two particular characters in these particular (and very sexually charged) circumstances. While we would all agree, I am sure, that Machado was keenly aware of the numerous social and political issues that pertain to his work (the question of slavery in Brazil, for one, or female sexuality, to mention another), as an artist — which is how he saw himself (Nunes x) — he understood that the novel was fundamentally a problem of

language, of issues relating to style, structure, characterization (his forte, according to Nunes), imagery, and semantics, and that the defining "realidade" of the human condition — our capacity to create, use, and process language — demanded a new way of writing and reading, both of which he then brings marvelously to life in the text that is *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas.* So if we wish, as John Gledson, for example, does,[8] to retain Machado in the realist camp, it is possible to do so, either because of what many critics have referred to as his "psychological realism" or because, as Professor Gledson correctly points out, Machado's post-1880 world accurately reflects the numerous social, political and economic conflicts and tensions of the time.

As I see it, however, the danger in reading Machado as a realist is that we will blind ourselves to what I believe is the central impulse of Machado's post-1880 art: his desire to create a new narrative, one that would, aesthetically speaking, answer only to itself as a self-conscious semiotic structure. This desire — one carefully manifested in the *Memórias Póstumas* — to undertake a new kind of writing, one profoundly ironic, metaphoric, and metafictive in nature, is what drives the late Machado and what separates him from everyone else in the Latin American narrative tradition.[9] As I suggested before, not until the time of Borges will we see another Latin American narrativist of a similarly revolutionary vision, and even then it is of a related but (as structuralism relates to poststructuralism) distinct variety.

I say all this because I believe it may provide an answer to the question that lies, tantalizingly unanswered, in the middle of Mac Adam's and Shiminovich's study: "Why Machado should have written in this vein," they write, "is one of the mysteries of literary history . . . ." (256). Influenced to a degree by Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*,

but going much farther than the English novelist in terms of what his text has to say about the relationship of language to reality and truth, and not wanting merely to "rewrite *Madame Bovary* in Brazilian terms" (Mac Adam and Shiminovich 256), Machado, I believe, was not only clear about the "extraordinary" nature of the new narrative he wanted to write,[10] he was fully conscious of just how radically new it was — and of how difficult it was going to be for people to appreciate it. This, for me, explains why Machado spends so much time in *Epitaph* having Brás talk to the reader about the nature of what he or she is reading and about how one should respond to it. Although it is very cleverly hidden among the numerous other narrative threads that Brás weaves together in his digressive and funny (though at times also dispairing, angry and bitter) telling of his lifestory, his wry divagations on how and why he writes as he does constitute nothing less than a poetics of Machado's new narrative, a kind of writing we're only now beginning to fully appreciate.[11] The question thus posed by Mac Adam and Schiminovich — how do you explain what Machado de Assis began to do in 1880 and *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cibas*? — is best answered, I would suggest, by recognizing that Machado was, with this novel, advocating a new theory of narrative, one that, as we shall now see, he took pains to suggest to the careful reader but which he would not elucidate without the covering cloaks of metaphor, ambiguity, and ironic humor.

Although generations of readers have taken *Epitaph* to be primarily about the destructive effects of egoism and cynicism, or about Machado's alleged pessimism, I would like to suggest that while these issues are most certainly part of it, this very influential novel is, at bottom, both a demonstration of what this new narrative will look like and an imagistically shrouded apology for it. As I suggested earlier, this interpreta-

tion of *Epitaph* offers what I feel is a more compelling explanation of why Machado wrote *Epitaph* as he did. Depending on how one regards certain chapters, there are, by my reckoning, some fifteen separate sections, or chapters, in which Brás Cubas (speaking, I believe, for Machado in these cases) touches, in one way or another, on the unique nature of his "posthumous memoirs." For those interested in reviewing these particular sections on your own, I'll quickly list them; they are the "Ao Leitor"/"To the Reader" introduction, then, in order, chaps. 9, 24, 27, 31, 34, 55, 71,72, 73, 86, 98, 124, 130, and, in the culmination of this discussion of Machado's new narrative, chapter 138.

After calling, in the "Ao Leitor" section, the reader's attention to the fact that she or he will be reading a text that is "most curious" and even "extraordinary," Brás then moves, only a few pages later, in chap. 9, to offer a more or less complete (if metaphorically veiled and comically rendered) statement of the new narrative that informs this text. Clearly implying, I think, that he is fully cognizant of (1) the demands of the realist tradition and (2) how his narrative will depart from that tradition, Brás (Machado) declares, of the very text that he himself is writing here, that:

> . . . o livro fica assim com tôdas as vantagens do método, sem a rigidez do método. . . . Que isto de método, sendo, como é, uma cousa indispensável, todavia é melhor tê-lo sem gravata nem suspensórios, mas um pouco à fresca e à sôlta, como quem não se lhe dá vizinha fronteira, nem do inspetor de quarteirão" (*Obra Completa*, tomo I, 523)

> . . . the book has all the advantages of system and method

> without the rigidity that they generally entail. . . . However, although system is indispensable, one should use it in a spirit of looseness and informality, in one's shirt-sleeves and sus penders, like a person who does not care what the lady who lives across the street, or even the policeman on the block, may think of him. (*Epitaph of a Small Winner*, 23-23)

If we read "system and method" as an acknowledgement of the aesthetics of the realist tradition and Brás's knowingly unorthodox style as exemplifying Machado's new narrative, then it does not take a distortion of the text to interpret the image of "the policeman on the block" as a reference to the hidebound critical establishment of the time, which, we know, was effectively counfounded by *Epitaph* and the new kind of writing (one distinguished by "a eloqüencia, que há uma genuína e vibrante, de uma arte natural e feiticeira" (OC 523)/"a genuine and vibrant eloquence, with a natural, engaging art," ESW 24) that Machado, through Brás Cubas, was advocating.

Not long after this, in chap. 34, in fact, Brás returns to the crucial, if artfully camouflaged, issue of how one is to read this new narrative, indeed, how one is to read literature, period. Questioning the reader's ability to correctly interpret what's going on (by openly challenging the very conclusion that the text itself has led the reader to arrive at, namely, that Brás is a self-serving cynic), Brás then ends this short, engimatic chapter by striking a metaphor that captures the problematic essence of the interpretive act itself: Is what we read, or think we read, really what's there? Or, perhaps better put: When we read something, how do we know what it really means? As Brás frames the issue:

> Retira, pois, a expressão, alma sensível, castiga os nervos, limpa os óculos, — que isso às vêzes é dos óculos, — . . . (OC 553)

> Withdraw, then, the unfortunate phrase that you used, sensi tive soul; discipline your nerves, clean your eyeglasses — for sometimes the trouble is with one's eyeglasses. (ESW 72)

By reading "eyeglasses" as one's critical position, one's response to a text, we sense here that Machado is telling us, via yet another wonderfully droll metaphor (eyeglasses), how to read this text, how to interpret it, for what we think we're reading, he simultaneously implies and demonstrates, is not necessarily what we're really reading. In this text in particular, as for literature in general, the problem is with one's interpretive stance, one's critical perspective, one's "eyeglasses," so to speak. Machado thus seems to be trying to suggest to his reader that something new is indeed afoot here, and that the old interpretive strategies associated with realism simply won't work any longer, that a new kind of critical thinking (new, or "cleaner," "óculos") is required for a new kind of writing. In many ways, the criticism that Machado offers here, like the criticism that Borges offers in the 1932 *Discusión* essays, ". . . belongs to the category Eliot had named criticism of the practicants, that is, the criticism practiced by those who are paving the way for their own creative writing (Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges* 245).

This dialogue with the reader concerning the reader's role in this text continues in chap. 71, ironically entitled, "O Senão do Livro"/"The Defect of This Book." I say ironically because Brás, again speaking for Machado, now declares (at about the halfway point of the novel) that

the real problem with his book has nothing to do with him or his style and that it has everything to do with . . . the reader, who, once again (except now in a more direct manner) , is singled out, albeit comically, as a key player in the actualization of the text being read! As Brás, exasperated, perhaps, by what he suspects is his reader's inability to appreciate what he's doing here, puts it, ". . . o maior defeito dêste livro es tu, leitor, Tu tens pressa de envelhecer, e o livro anda devagar;" (OC 581)/". . . the great defect of this book is you, reader. You want to live fast, to get to the end, and the book ambles along slowly;" (ESW 117). Making reference here, seemingly, to two of the most basic tenets of realist narrative, its linearity and its logically sequential plot structure (both of which are conspicuously missing from his narrative), Brás is making an even stronger, more pointed — yet still humorously oblique — reference to what is new and different in the narrative he's writing. He then extends this critique of the typical reader's response to realist narrative by creating what I think is one of the most memorable metaphors in all of literature: that the style he's employing here is like the way a pair of drunks walk down the street! As Brás blithly puts it, speaking directly to his reader:

> ...tu amas a narração direita e nutrida, o estilo regular e fluente, e êste livro e o meu estilo são como os ébrios, guinam à direita e à esquerda, andam e param, resmungam, urram, gargalham, ameaçam o céu, escorregam e caem . . . . (OC 581)

> ...you like straight, solid narrative and a smooth style, but this book and my style are like a pair of drunks: they stagger to the right and to the left, they start and they stop, they mutter, they

> roar, they guffaw, they threaten, they slip and fall . . . . (ESW 117-18).

Moreover, by ending this last sentence in an ellipsis (Machado cultivates the ellipsis more than any other writer I know), he allows the reader a punctuation-guided opportunity to enter into the construction of the text's meaning,[12] to cogitate on what the preceeding passage might have meant and to imbue it with various forms and degrees of significance — all of which constitutes yet another mark of the new narrative, the one in which the reader is forced to abandon his or her formerly passive role and adopt a new, active one. One is also led to argue, therefore, that in addition to having written Latin America's first new narrative, Machado also initiated a new role for the reader, a new aesthetics of reading, one which Brazilian narrativists would continue to develop for generations to come. Borges, I think, would have applauded this move, for its motivation — the freeing of the reader as well as the writer from the critical straightjacket demanded by realism — is very close to what he proposes in his famous 1932 essays, "La postulación de la realidad" (The Postulation of Reality) and "El arte narrativo y la magia" (Narrative Art and Magic). The liberating effect of Machado and Borges on their respective narrative traditions is an area of investigation that warrents further comparative study, I think, and although I do not have speace here to discuss it, I would like to call your attention to it.[13]

As if to offer further proof that this weaning of the reader from the breast of realism was one of his main goals in writing his *Memoirs* as he does, Brás moves, in chap. 124, to actually bring these issues up, though not in a way that makes it at all obvious to the reader exactly what he

means; it is an essential technique of *Epitaph* that, for all Brás chatters to the reader about how unusual his text is, he never quite gets around to telling us what we really need to know, that is, exactly how we're to interpret it. Rather than simply explain things for us — which he never really does — Machado, an exemplar of the "show," don't "tell" school of narrative, continually draws the reader into an arresting yet always uncertain confrontation with what is new and different about his narrative. The consistency and organization with which he does this, as I've tried to show, is what makes me feel that he was very clear in his own mind about what he wanted to achieve in this novel. But, at the same time, he could not bring himself to simply tell the reader, in straightforward terms, what, precisely, he was doing. Instead, Machado keeps bringing up what is unconventional about the style and structure of *Epitaph* while at the same time draping his self-consciously self-critical discourse in closely interweaving layers of ambiguity, irony, and metaphor. Speaking metafictively about why he felt it necessary to interpose chap. 124 at this point in his text, Brás avers, for example, ". . . se eu não compusesse êste capítulo, padeceria o leitor um forte abalo" (OC 618)?". . . if I did not interpose this chapter, the reader might suffer a great shock" (ESW 180), a sentence that seems to portend some great revelation in defense of the reader's delicate sensibilities and critical acumen. What is forthcoming instead, however, is a seemingly idle reference that actually functions as a clue to the alert reader about just how deliberately anti-realistic this narrative really is, a tactic that allows Brás to deftly move his reader in quite another and unexpected direction, one that does not defend the reader as much as it validates what Brás seeks to do here. As he expresses it:

> . . . se eu não compusesse êste capítulo, padeceria o leitor um forte abalo, assaz danoso ao efeito do livro. Saltar de um retrato a um epitáfio, pode ser real e comum; o leitor, entretanto, não se refugia no livro, senão para escapar à vida. (OC 618-619)

> . . . if I did not interpose this chapter, the reader might suffer a great shock. To hop from a character study to an epitaph may be realistic and even commonplace, but the reader probably would not have taken refuge in this book if he had not wished to escape the realistic and the commonplace. (ESW 180)

Through the mouth of Brás Cubas, his self-conscious narrator/ protagonist, the real author, Machado de Assis, is as close here as he will ever get to telling us outright about his intention to move beyond the orthodox "commonplaces" of realism, the old, conventional way of writing—and reading—narrative. And by reminding the reader that, by this point in the narrative (we're virtually at the end here), he or she is still consuming it — that is, still participating in it — Brás, or Machado, is effectively declaring the arrival — the victory, if you will — of a new aesthetics of reading, the birth of a new kind of reader, one who will not hesitate to become involved in the production of the text's meaning and whose active, creative presence in the narrative act will be continued and expanded upon by subsequent generations of Brazilian narrativists, from Mário and Oswald de Andrade to Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Osman Lins, and, though in a slightly different sense, even Marilene Felinto.

Machado's culminating statement about the new narrative he and his critically self-conscious alter-ego, Brás Cubas, are writing appears

only a few pages later, in chap. 138, entitled, provocatively enough, "A um Crítico"/"To a Critic". The apogee of Machado's carefully embedded discourse on the nature of the new narrative he's inventing here, chap. 138 also hearkens back to the point made in chap. 9 about how the text that is *Epitaph* itself exemplifies the aesthetics of this new narrative. In the later chapter, however, Brás has set up an imaginary critic and is patiently explaining to him exactly how to interpret a seemingly simple sentence that he's just written. As Brás humorously lays it out, the issue in question centers on the relationship between style and meaning, specifically, how can a man who is dead be writing in a style that is so gay and spirited? After all, doesn't death have a depressing effect on one's outlook? (no, to the contrary, Brás sardonically avers, what could be more liberting than death?). The more significant problem, however, and one only (but artfully) alluded to by Brás, is familiar to all students of literature: How do the style and meaning of a single part of a text relate to the styles, structures, and meanings of the rest of the text? Or, to put it more succinctly, how does one know how to properly read any particular section of a text, a question that, of course, is especially germane to a critically self-referential and seemingly fragmented text like *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. (Actually, the *Memórias Póstumas* only give the *appearance* of being fragmented; in truth, this text has a very tight and cohesive, if ironically self-referential, structure). As Brás, sounding a bit like an exasperated T. S. Eliot discoursing on the objective correlative, puts it:

> Quero dizer, sim, que em cada fase da narração da minha vida experimento a sensação correspondente. Valha-me Deus! é preciso explicar tudo. (OC 625)

> The meaning of the sentence rests upon the fact that in writing each phase of the story of my life I feel the corresponding emotion or attitude, which is of course reflected in my style. Good God, do I have to explain everything! (ESW 190)

Comically introducing, in this last line, the specter of the writer who, knowing he's written something so unusual that his public will probably not know what to make of it, much less appreciate it, Brás here seems to vent the kind of frustration that Machado must have felt as he was composing *Epitaph*[14] and thinking about its eventual reception.

And while we cannot, of course, really know what Machado was feeling or thinking late in 1879 as he was finishing *Epitaph*, what we can be sure of is that this chapter effectively concludes the metacritical discourse on the nature of Machado's new narrative that runs through *Epitaph* and that is embodied in it. Even the tone of this final sentence of chap. 138 — "Valha-me Deus! é preciso explicar tudo."/"Good God, do I have to explain everything!" — expresses a strong feeling of closure, of finality, of having said everything that there was to say (or, at least, everything that Machado was willing to say) about the subject. Although there would be several other delightful examples of it, from here until the conclusion of the story there would be no more self-conscious disquisitions by Brás about the new narrative he was writing; if, by chap. 134, "A um Crítico"/"To a Critic", the reader still hasn't picked up on the blueprint that's being offered here about how to read *Epitaph*, then it's not likely to happen in the final few pages, and the poor reader will probably remain be fuddled about the new theory of writing and reading that is being very subtly advanced in this extraordinary book.

Having surveyed the five key chapters that are devoted to a hidden discussion of what Machado's new narrative was to be like, and why, it may be useful now to return to the question posed by Mac Adam and Schiminovich: Why did Machado elect to reject orthodox realism and create ". . . a radically different kind of prose fiction . . . ," one which would live on through the generations in Brazilian narrative and one which, as I have argued, would make Brazilian narrative significantly different from Spanish American narrative at least until the time of Borges and the *Ficciones* and possibly until the time of Cabrera Infante and Sarduy in the 1970s, when Brazilian and Spanish American narrative seem to have much more in common than they had previously had. Mac Adam and Schiminovich suggest that an answer to this question, one crucial to any comparative study of Latin American narrative, may be found in literary history, specifically in the fact that Machado seems to have been much more deeply influenced by Sterne's satiric *Tristram Shandy* than by Flaubert's realistic *Madame Bovary*, a novel he also knew well.

This explanation is almost certainly part of the answer, but I wonder if it's entirely adequate. My suggestion, as I hope I've been able to make clear for you, is that Machado, like the Borges of the late 1930s, had come to see that literature, a function of language, is not, in and of itself, connected in any way to three-dimensional reality, that its only reality, in fact, was its own semiotically ambiguous and self-referential field of reference. From this realization it follows logically that Machado would begin to write a narrative that was deliberately at odds with the prevailing tenets of realism, a movement that, as Mac Adam, Monegal, Dixon and a host of other critics have argued, exerted an essentially retardative influence on the development of Latin American narrative.

But it would also be reasonable to assume that Machado, keenly aware of how revolutionary his new narrative was, would feel the need to educate his reader, to give her or him a chance to understand why *Epitaph* was being written as it was. Although there is no doubt whatever that the reader of *Epitaph* can, as Professor Gledson argues in *The Deceptive Realism of Machado de Assis*, extrapolate valid socio-political significance from it, it's still possible to feel that, like the later Borges, Machado understood, already in the late 1870s, that, as René Wellek has said, realism was simply bad aesthetics,[15] that it was built on a naive sense of the relationship between language, reality and truth, and that a new and better form of literary art could be achieved, one more conscious of its status as a system of linguistic signs and structures. This new writing would possess, as Brás Cubas says of his own work in chap. 9 of *Epitaph*, "a genuine and vibrant eloquence" stemming from a realization of itself as a closed though semantically fluid and productive semiotic system, one in which each verbal structure speaks (as Brás's chapters do)[16] to the others that constitute the overall structure and, simultaneously, to the reader, whose job it then becomes to enter into the multiple ironies, tropes, images and metaphors that are involved in the operation of the text, to decipher its various codes, and to impute meaning to them.

I apologize for that last sentence; it's a good example of the kind of writing that Brás Cubas did not engage in, and that he would have ridiculed as being too jargonish, too stilted and too confident it could say exactly what its author intended it to say. Nevertheless, its presence suggests perhaps how even in 1997 the careful reader still feels "interpretively challenged" in the now sympathetic, now derisive presence of Brás Cubas and his deliciously eliptical discourse.

Indeed, as I'm beginning to close my discussion, this would be a good time to return to a reference made in the title of my essay: what would Brás Cubas say, finally, about Spanish American narrative? When I wrote that part of the title, I had wanted to set Brás up as a kind of late nineteenth century super-critic and author, a man who, from his perfect vantage point in the hereafter, could assess the comparative development of Brazilian and Spanish American literature for us. Although I've already let Brás speak for himself quite a bit about his own narrative, *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, I'd like to conclude my commentary by imagining what Brás (that is, Machado de Assis) would tell us about the Spanish American novel, which, to distract him from what he would call the tedium of eternity, he most certainly would have read.

In a supremely chatty yet often acerbic style, one highlighted by exclamation points, ironies, sardonic admonitions and ellipses, Brás would, I think, have three basic observations to make about Spanish American narrative.

First, he would agree with Rodríguez Monegal about the historical development of the Brazilian novel, that, owing most likely to Brazil's relatively stable political history and society, it developed, in Monegal's words, ". . . more harmoniously and coherently than the Spanish American . . . ," establishing , by the nineteenth century, ". . . a narrative tradition that in the course of its evolution in the next century would continue to produce some of the best Latin American writers" (*Borzoi Anthology*, vol. I, p. 174). With Brás's permission, what I would like to add to Prof. Monegal's comment is that I think this Brazilian narrative tradition tends to be characterized by its metafictive dimension, and especially by its tendency to interrogate identity and being in terms of

language, a concern that, as in Lispector's *Água viva*, Rosa's *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, and Lins's *Avalovara*, is then reproduced in the narrative structure itself.

Second, Brás would probably concur with Mac Adam and Schiminovich as well that by 1880 realism was a dead star, that it had held Latin American narrativists in thrall for too long and that it needed to be discarded — by readers as well as by writers! Thinking of such seminal Brazilian narratives of the 1920s and 1930s as *Macunaíma* (1928), *As Memórias Sentimentais de João Miramar* (1924), *Serafim Ponte Grande* (1933), and *Vidas Sêcas* (1938), Brás might also feel, however, that Spanish America held on to realism longer than it should have, that it needed earlier to see narrative as a self-referential structure of words, or signs, rather than as a mimetic reflection of society, and that this did not begin to happen until the time of Borges.

And, although he would quite properly rebuke me for my ponderous style, Brás, I think, would finally agree with me that by the late 1870s Machado de Assis had indeed wanted to develop a new kind of writing, a new narrative that would demonstrate the shallowness of realism and naturalism at the same time that it would highlight the absolute centrality of language (and its self-referential nature) to the novel form. By arguing on behalf of a narrative that answers, aesthetically speaking, only to the contingencies of its own status as a verbal structure, a "fiction" as it were, Brás would contend that his "posthumous memoirs" of 1880 anticipate, though with a slightly different spin, the great breakthrough achieved later by Borges, who, with the publication of his *Ficciones* in 1944 (the same year that Lispector's first novel, *Perto do Coração Selvagem/Near to the Wild Heart*, appeared), would finally put Latin American literature on the map. Complaining, un-

doubtedly, that the Brazilian contribution to this landmark event has been egregiously overlooked, Brás would probably also argue that while both he and Borges make use of the fantastic in their narratives, they do so for different reasons and in ways that, ultimately, have very different consequences. While Borges's elegant and intricate texts came, in the 1960s, to epitomize the structuralist worldview, the more ironic and language-sensitive Brazilian variety, stemming from a dead though still archly self-conscious author who is writing his comically metafictive memoirs while astride a hippo flying back through time,[17] would engender an ontologically oriented narrative tradition that tends more toward the kind of semantic and philosophic discourse we associate with poststructural thought. Brás, I think, as a good Latin American bourgeoisie, would be pleased to see how Latin American narrative has come, in the twentieth century, to be graced with numerous masterpieces in both these great twentieth century literary theories, though, with the exceptions of works like *Tres tristes tigres* (1967) and *Cobra* (1972) — works I am sure he would have enjoyed — he would have definitely favored the more "cafajeste"[18] flavored Brazilian variety.

And, finally, Brás would, I think, feel sure that Borges would also agree with him when, in his famous preface, he declared, to all those who would read him:

> . . . evito contar o processo extraordinário que empreguei na composição destas *Memórias*, trabalhadas cá no outro mundo. Seria curioso, mas nìmiamente extenso, e aliás desnecessário ao entendimento da obra. A obra em si mesma é tudo; se te agradar, fino leitor, pago-me da tarefa; se te não agradar, pago-te com um piparote, adeus. (OC 511)

> I shall not relate the extraordinary method that I used in composition of these memoirs, written here in the world be yond. It is a most curious method, but its relation would require an excessive amount of space and, moreover, is unnec essary to an understanding of the work. The book must suffice in itself: if it please you, excellent reader, I shall be rewarded for my labor; it if please you not, I shall reward you with a snap of my fingers, and good riddance to you. (ESW 3)

In conclusion, I can only say that, taking my cue from Brás Cubas, I hope my labor has pleased you, excellent reader of *Mester*, for I would never dream of snapping my fingers at such a patient audience as you.

—Earl E. Fitz
The Pennsylvania State University

Notes

[1] Examples of first-person (though not what we would call metafictive) narrative abound in early Spanish American literature. Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Verdadera Historia de la Conquista de la Nueva España* and Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* are prime examples of this type of writing. Later first-person narratives, somewhat more literary in nature (and that must be considered important precursors of the Spanish American novel, which is often said to have begun in 1816 with José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento*), include Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's *Infortunios de Alonso Ramírez* (1690) and Alonso Carrió de la Vandera's ("Concolorcorvo's") *Lazarillo de ciegos caminantes* (1773).

[2] See, for example, Sandra Messinger Cypess, "Machado de Assis vs. Brás Cubas: The Narrative Situation of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1980): 355-70.

[3] Another critic who takes a similar view of this issue is Paul Dixon, who, in "The Modernity of Machado de Assis" (*Hispanic Studies Series*, vol. 4, 1989, pp. 71-80), discusses Machado's work in the context of the pronouncements made by Carlos Fuentes in his *La nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* (1969).

[4] Of this issue, Monegal has written that, ". . . Borges anticipates the structuralists in viewing literature in systemic terms, as an integrted collection of interrelated texts with its own autonomous development" (*Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature*, v. 2, p. 500).

[5] One could argue, moreover, that the issue of veracity itself — in literature and in life — has emerged as another of the defining characteristics of twentieth century Brazilian literature.

[6] See Monegal, *The Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature*, Vol. II. New York: Knopf, 1977: xiv. See also, Alfred Mac Adam who, in *Textual Confrontations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987: 176), advances a similar argument.

[7] *The Postmodern Movement: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovation in the Arts*, edited and with an introduction by Stanley Trachtenberg. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985: 251-262.

[8] John Gledson, *The Deceptive Realism of Machado de Assis.: A Dissenting Interpretation of Dom Casmurro*, Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1984. Mac Adam, on the other hand, is critical of Gledson's interpretion of Machado as a realist and argues that Gledson reads him from an overly restrictive ideological perspective (*Textual Confrontations*, pp. 1-18).

[9] It also separates him from such North American masters of the time as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane and Henry James.

[10] In his "Ao Leitor"/"To The Reader" section of the novel, Brás (that is, Machado) informs the reader that ". . . evito contar o processo extraordinário que empreguei na composição destas *Memórias*, trabalhadas cá no outro mundo" (*Obra Completa*, tomo I, p. 511)/". . . I shall not relate the extraordinary method that I used in the composition of these memoirs, written hre in the world beyond" (*Epitaph of a Small Winner*, trans. by William L. Grossman, New York: Noonday Press, 1995: 3).

[11] John Barth, for example, whose first novel, *The Floating Opera*, was directly influenced by Machado's work, has written that, for him, Machado is the ". . . protopost-modernist" (Fitz, *Machado de Assis*, 45; 142).

[12] An even more brilliant example of this same technique is found in chap. 55, "O Velho Diálogo de Adão e Eva"/"The Venerable Dialogue of Adam and Eve," where Brás and Virgília, now lovers, have a "conversation" that contains no words at all. The reader is guided by her or his sense of who and what these two characters are by this point in the narrative and by the punctuation marks

that end the "sentences." Appearing approximately one-third of the way into the novel, this famous chapter is the ultimate text of the ability of Machado's reader to participate actively and creatively in the construction of the text's significance.

[13] As far as I know, Borges never knew of Machado's work, although somewhere he does make reference to the name of Machado's great contemporary, Euclides da Cunha, the author of *Os Sertões* (1902). If it is true, then, as it seems to be, that Borges does not at least mention the name of Machado de Assis, it would only underscore the extraordinary isolation that Brazilian literature exists in, even within the context of Latin American literature (this being a condition that is slowly beginning to change, however). It is fascinating, though, to speculate about what Borges would have to say about a writer like Machado de Assis.

[14] It is said that some six chapters of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* were dictated to Machado's wife, Carolina.

[15] This is a conclusion that, in relation to realism in general, René Wellek reaches. See his *Concepts of Criticism*, p. 255.

[16] The most important self-referentiality of Machado's novel, I would argue, actually stems from the way his various chapters and images refer continually (and both directly and indirectly) to each other. Although Brás's wryly metafictive voice is the most obvious self-referential quality to the text (and most certainly its most pleasurable), it is not, I believe, the most significant in terms of the new narrative theory that Machado is advancing here.

[17] See chap. 7, "O Delírio"/"The Delirium," which can be read as a microcosm of the entire book.

[18] Claude L. Hulet, *Brazilian Literature*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1974), p. 97.

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Dialogía y heterobiografía en *Cerbero son las sombras* de Juan José Millás

En 1974, un joven escritor desconocido se hizo acreedor del Premio Sésamo por su primera novela. Se trataba de Juan José Millás y de *Cerbero son las sombras,* opera prima que en su momento significó el descubrimiento de un novelista portador de un universo imaginativo propio, y la prueba palpable de que la novela española transitaba con pasos firmes hacia una renovación temático-técnica.

El movimiento de renovación de la novela española, del que Millás y su primera obra son productos, comienza en 1962 con la publicación de *Tiempo de silencio* de Luis Martín Santos, cuya visión radicalmente subjetiva de la realidad es idéntica a la utilizada por Millás en *Cerbero son las sombras.* La inflexión que provocó Martín Santos en la novela realista que había dominado preeminentemente la escena literaria de la postguerra, es acentuada por Juan Benet, hacedor de una de las empresas novelísticas de más ardua y minuciosa elaboración retórica en la literatura española. De Benet, Millás asimilará la propuesta de una lectura inédita de la guerra civil, trasladando el tratamiento artístico/literario de tal acontecimiento, "desde el lugar que hasta entonces había ocupado: la historia, lo político, hacia un espacio diferente: lo mítico, lo privado" (Bértolo 37).

El presente ensayo tiene como propósito primordial analizar la organización discursiva de *Cerbero son las sombras,* novela que contiene las constantes narrativas básicas que Millás desarrollará en sus novelas

posteriores. Se nos ofrecen así las pautas que definen la andadura ficcional del escritor valenciano, al punto de poder afirmar que *Cerbero son las sombras* constituye la summa introductoria indispensable para entender el proyecto literario de J.J. Millás. El mundo opresivo de *Cerbero son las sombras*, su crítica devastadora de una sociedad y un tiempo mezquinos, el develamiento de la condición miserable del hombre moderno y de su precariedad existencial, la sitúan dentro de una tradición literaria excelsa, cuyos antecedentes más significativos son las obras de Kafka y Gombrowicz, la narrativa existencialista francesa y el neorrealismo italiano.

Tal vez el rasgo fundamental a nivel narratológico que define a *Cerbero son las sombras* sea el permanente autocuestionamiento de su estatuto formal. De ahí que la novela (la carta) sea un elemento más de la trama, y exponga frecuentemente el proceso de su escritura, empresa que se revela como una problemática experiencia de los límites (entre realidad y ficción, sueño y verdad, vida y literatura). Para el teórico ruso Mijail Bajtín, este carácter de autoindagación es precisamente la marca que distingue a la novela de otros géneros literarios. La singularidad de la novela consiste, según Bajtín, en ser éste "un género en búsqueda permanente, un género que se autoinvestiga constantemente y que revisa incesantemente todas las formas del mismo ya constituidas" (*Teoría y estética de la novela* 484). La naturaleza proteica de la novela como género, su permanente lucha consigo misma y con sus formulaciones estéticas y narratológicas, es el contexto funcional en que se inscribe la novela de Millás: la carta que es *Cerbero son las sombras* instaura en la dimensión textual su propia autocrítica.

La condición autorreflexiva de la escritura es uno de los rasgos que define a la novelística de Juan José Millás. El sostenido uso que de la

técnica metafictiva ha hecho Millás en su literatura remite al "tema cardinal" que Gonzalo Sobejano detectaba en la novela española de los años setenta: "la busca del sentido de la existencia en el sentido de la escritura, placenteramente ejecutada y observada como una proeza de la voluntad de ser" ("Ante la novela de los años setenta" 507), con la salvedad de que a través del recurso metaficcional, *Cerbero son las sombras* muestra la insuficiencia de la escritura como instrumento de autoconocimiento.

El hecho de que la voz relatora de *Cerbero* sea la primera persona determina que nuestro conocimiento de la historia pase por el tamiz emocional e intelectual del protagonista-narrador. Vemos (leemos) a través de sus ojos y de modo singular que la recepción textual se ve mediatizada por esta circunstancia. Además, este narrador tenderá a subrayar su problemática existencial, con lo cual se alternan el nivel argumental de la historia y el plano de la reflexión personal. Con frecuencia, la reflexividad de orden metafísico subsume y aniquila la narratividad, rompiéndose en muchos casos el equilibrio entre lo novelesco y lo puramente ensayístico. Este desbalance podría entenderse como una manifestación más de la naturaleza autocrítica que Bajtín asignaba al género novelístico. Lo cierto es que en ocasiones, el narrador autorial de *Cerbero son las sombras* parece estar escribiendo un tratado filosófico de tintes existencialistas y no una ficción novelesca.

A fin de lograr sustancia autocognoscitiva, el narrador de *Cerbero* se entrega a la tarea de escribir una extensa carta a su padre, en la que intenta clarificar los últimos acontecimientos sufridos por su familia. La escritura se concibe, consecuentemente, como instrumento capaz de ordenar en una estructura superior (la imaginaria) la caótica realidad exterior. Es interesante notar que la dicotomía realidad interior-

realidad exterior funciona como el eje dialéctico que configura la visión pesimista del protagonista de la novela de Millás. La fisura surge en el momento en que constata la insuficiencia de la escritura como mecanismo de indagación autocognoscitiva:

> sentí por un momento la imperiosa necesidad de escaparme de mí saltando desde la boca, por ejemplo, para estrellarme minúsculo e invisible como una mosca aplastada contra las frías baldosas de mi cuarto. Y si en aquel momento no renuncié para siempre a la expresión verbal fue porque sabía que ésta, a pesar de su inutilidad radical, habría de traerme algunas horas de sosiego, cuando perdiera el miedo a la resonancia solitaria de mi propia voz... (42)[1]

Esta revelación se da en el inicio de la carta; no obstante, no se abandona la tarea escritural, se intensifica más bien, a pesar de la conciencia del fracaso.

La inutilidad de la escritura de la carta nace, precisamente, de la falacia formal de la novela; falsedad que el mismo narrador se encargará de señalar, con lo cual el texto instaura y niega al mismo tiempo su condición genérica:

> Tal vez si aún no salgo a la calle a molestar un poco a los transeúntes o a entregarme a la policía no es por ellas, sino más bien por ver hasta dónde es capaz de llegar este mal iniciado diálogo entre mi memoria y yo. Porque los diálogos comienzan siempre silenciando el objeto mismo de su puesta en marcha, y aunque en ocasiones surge con dificultad en alguna esquina

> del discurso, la mayoría de las veces muere asfixiado entre tanta palabrería inútil, pero inevitable para quien, como yo, aún espera de sí mismo alcanzar la madurez necesaria para iniciar un gesto definitivo... (62)

De esta manera, se declara la naturaleza real de la epístola: su condición de documento autobiográfico.

En términos reales, el conflicto esencial del narrador de *Cerbero son las sombras* consiste en haberse dado cuenta de que "el texto autobiográfico es un artefacto retórico y que el artificio de la literatura lejos de reproducir o crear una vida producen su desapropiación" (Loureiro 6), sin renunciar por ello a su escritura ensimismada: "no hay forma posible de diálogo con nuestro propio ser, que no esté basada en su mutilación" (66). A lo largo de su autoepístola, el narrador no logra constituir una segunda conciencia equitativa diferente de la suya, con la cual superar la condición autográfica de su escritura y convertir "lo autobiográfico en heterobiográfico" (Loureiro 7). Para ello, ha de asumir plenamente que la escritura del yo es, en esencia, una empresa de carácter dialógico.

La noción bajtiniana de dialogía adolece de versiones contradictorias. En su libro *The Resistance to Theory*, Paul de Man consignaba con sutil ironía tal situación: "Dialogism can mean, and indeed has meant, many things to many critics, sometimes without reference to Bakhtin" (107). De Man señalaba asimismo las dos vertientes fundamentales del dialogismo: "dialogism as a metalinguistic structure" y "dialogism as a recognition of exotopy" (110). El primer enfoque estaría próximo tanto al "texto plural" de Barthes, que éste define como un espacio multidimensional "in which a variety of writings, none of them origi-

nal, blend and clash" (*Image, music, text* 146), como al concepto de "hipertextualidad" que Gerard Genette califica como "una noción general de texto en segundo grado o texto derivado de otro texto preexistente" (14), con la importante puntualización de que en Bajtín, la dialogía textual representa una polifonía de voces en que "la voz propia y la ajena son de igual valor" (Zavala 89), y no un proceso dialéctico de jerarquías estimativas.

La segunda vertiente del dialogismo señalada por Paul de Man es la que Bajtín desarrolla en las notas y el libro sobre Dostoievski, y a partir de la cual podemos estructurar una teoría del sujeto que sirva de base no sólo a la reformulación teórica de la autobiografía como género literario, sino también a la fundamentación de una teoría de la lectura que contemple al lector implícito como elemento estructural imprescindible en el proceso de la creación literaria.

El monologismo que afecta al narrador protagonista, su "problema de soledad" (9), invade y permea la disposición retórica de su escritura, proyectando una circularidad metaficcional: la carta al padre termina con las palabras con que había comenzado. La identidad monológica del narrador de *Cerbero* evidencia su incapacidad comunicativa para con los demás, por lo que "la carta al padre se transforma en carta a sí mismo o a nadie" (Sobejano, "Juan José Millás, fabulador de la extrañeza" 199). De esta manera, se recusa el texto autobiográfico tradicional, que no logra asumir la naturaleza dialógica de toda tentativa autoindagadora:

> Y ya en cada palabra que escribo o que borro para rectificar el sentido, con la ilusión de dominar el discurso de las frases, no hago sino tratar de afirmarme, lo que en definitiva no hace sino denunciar mi inconsistencia, porque si de otro modo fuera, ya

> habría arrojado las cuartillas al interior de las jaulas, para que ellos se entretuvieran mientras las hembras paren. (102-103)

El "problema de soledad" que afecta tanto al hijo (narrador) como al padre (narratario), y cuyo síntoma más evidente es el fracaso existencial de ambos, remite a la exotopía como principio estructurador básico de una enunciación dialógica de la subjetividad y la autoconciencia. En este sentido, la exotopía implica la existencia de "conciencias equitativas y capaces de respuesta, de un otro yo (el tú) igualitario" (Bajtín, *Estética de la creación verbal* 333). Es lo que Paul de Man llama "a principle of radical otherness" (109): esa otredad que otorga los sentidos, a través de la cual nos reconocemos; en síntesis, la heteroconciencia.

La dialogía exotópica es, sin duda, una propuesta de orden filosófico, cuyas implicaciones sobrepasan cualquier valoración narratológica, y que nos ayuda a comprender y descifrar la hondura existencial implícita en la novela de Juan José Millás. La soledad, la angustia y el miedo que pueblan las páginas de *Cerbero son las sombras*, son síntomas claros de la condición que Bajtín denomina monologismo, y que resume la paradoja de la incomunicación del hombre moderno. Para Bajtín, el gran acierto de Dostoievski radica en haber afirmado "la imposibilidad de la soledad, su carácter ilusorio" (*Estética de la creación verbal* 327).

El autoconocimiento efectivo pasa, necesariamente, por la negación sistemática de la subjetividad autárquica y la aceptación de la alteridad, ya que "ser significa comunicarse. Ser significa ser para otro y a través del otro ser para sí mismo" (*Estética de la creación verbal* 327-28). Es esta tesitura la que ejemplifica y problematiza Millás en su primera novela. En este sentido, el dialogismo es el elemento necesario para reconvertir la escritura autográfica de la novela-carta en un texto de naturaleza

heterobiográfica; para lo cual es indispensable la delimitación de una conciencia (de un tú narrativo) que se constituya en destinatario de la misiva, posibilitando una relación dialógica con respecto al narrador autorial. Este último es consciente de tal necesidad cuando asevera que "no hay forma posible de diálogo con nuestro propio ser, que no esté basada en su mutilación" (66), afirmación que define la empresa autobiográfica como una "desapropiación" (Loureiro 6).

La dialogía en el interior del texto es posible si efectuamos una sustitución radical en la estructura comunicativa de la epístola: Narrador——>Narratario=padre=lector implícito. En otras palabras, el padre como narratario es, en realidad, una ficción, "un segundo yo creado en la experiencia de la escritura" (Loureiro 3), y no otra conciencia equitativa con la que conformar una asociación dialógica. De ahí que esta contradicción o fisura estructural se vea resuelta si concluimos y aceptamos que el verdadero narratario de la novela no es otro que el lector implícito, fórmula que haría posible el pacto dialogístico, y consecuentemente, la configuración comunicativa de orden heterobiográfico.

Conviene recordar que el lector implícito es un factor estructural en la dinámica funcional de la ficción. Como certeramente indica Wolfgang Iser, "el lector implícito no posee una existencia real, pues encarna la totalidad de la preorientación que un texto de ficción ofrece a sus posibles lectores" (64). De acuerdo con estas ideas, cabe preguntarse de qué manera *Cerbero son las sombras* instituye o piensa a su receptor. Es preciso advertir que la novela de Millás inscribe al lector implícito por medio de lo que Roland Barthes llama "signs of reading" (110).

Los signos de lectura vendrían a ser piezas constitutivas de la "retórica de la ficción", entendiendo el concepto de retórica en el

sentido estricto en que lo interpreta Wayne Booth: "elements that are recognizable, separable, friends of the reader" (106). La contribución teórica primordial de Booth consiste, a mi entender, en la consideración de la retórica como elemento fundacional de una teoría de la lectura, cuyos postulados principales se asemejan a la concepción dialógica de Mijail Bajtín y a la idea de lector implícito desarrollada por Iser. Resulta interesante notar que con su idea de la retórica como componente indispensable de toda obra literaria ("the author cannot choose to avoid rhetoric; he can choose only the kind of rhetoric he will employ", *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 149), Wayne Booth prefigura las reflexiones tropológicas que Paul de Man desenvuelve en su libro *Allegories of Reading*, sobre todo con relación a la literatura de Rousseau.

Los signos de lectura en *Cerbero son las sombras* son indicios orgánicos del sistema de anacronías que se organiza en la novela; estos signos sólo adquieren su plenitud de sentido en el contexto anacrónico. En su libro *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gerard Genette sitúa el origen de las disparidades temporales en la esfera de lo que él denomina "order" (33-85). En síntesis, las discordancias de tipo temporal se suscitan en la articulación del nivel de la historia (histoire/story: los eventos de la narración en su orden cronológico) y el de la trama (récit/plot: los eventos en el orden en que son dispuestos en la narración). En este sentido, y teniendo en cuenta que la acción relatora del narrador de *Cerbero* se proyecta a partir de la memoria, la yuxtaposición entre analepsis y prolepsis constituye el marco funcional de una temporalidad que se concibe problemática. En repetidas ocasiones, el narrador de *Cerbero* afirmará la dificultad de mantener la linealidad cronológica del relato: "por eso lucho contra la imaginación, que me acerca a vuestro estado actual, y regreso después de tantas interrupciones de diferente

signo a aquel día en el que apareció tu compañero" (166-67).

Dentro de la narración de *Cerbero son las sombras* juega un papel preponderante el tema de la moral, que se asocia con el miedo y el fracaso existencial, y en último término, con la escritura de la carta al padre. Moral e historia que se identifican frecuentemente con espacios sórdidos, en un proceso de índole cronotópica. Una espacialidad cerrada y asfixiante que traduce una temporalidad histórica específica (la España franquista); términos conformantes de lo que podríamos llamar, remedando la terminología bajtiniana, el cronotopo de la derrota. Y es que tanto el padre como el hijo, Rosa como Jacinto, e incluso la misma madre todopoderosa, reflejan la tragedia de los vencidos en la guerra civil española. Lo singular del texto de Millás es la capacidad que despliega para transmitir este sentimiento sin especificar las circunstancias históricas.

En este sentido, la escritura de la carta nace de la necesidad de explicar la marginalidad de los vencidos desde dentro, y en gran medida, para reconstruir un pasado que se considera valioso. Es, desde este punto de vista, una tarea moralizante que intenta acallar la mala conciencia que invade a los personajes y que Nietzsche consideraba una "enfermedad", "una crueldad de artista" (100). De ahí que el narrador-protagonista proponga una "nueva moral, cuya virtud máxima consistía en no serlo; una nueva moral que no lo era, porque estaba del lado de la vida y la vida no necesita tales calificativos" (148). Historia, memoria y moral se funden así en una cronotopía que tiende a subrayar la vulnerabilidad del individuo frente a los convencionalismos sociales.

Por último, el mecanismo cronotópico permite dilucidar la impronta kafkiana de *Cerbero son las sombras*. Estructuralmente, es evidente la influencia de la *Carta al padre* de Kafka, sin olvidar que dicha influencia

no afecta al contenido, ya que en la novela de Millás se invierten los términos de la querella kafkiana: se recrimina a la madre y se idealiza amorosamente la figura del padre. Por ello, es el Kafka de *La metamorfosis* el que mejor asimila *Cerbero son las sombras*, sobre todo con respecto a Jacinto, alter ego de Gregorio Samsa: "al pasar ante la puerta del cuarto de Jacinto, de donde salían extraños y asquerosos ruidos, como de un animal que comiese carroña" (65), palabras que evocan el horror de la familia Samsa ante el escarabajo en que se convierte Gregorio.

La plasmación de la atmósfera kafkiana y el cuestionamiento radical de la realidad exterior que realiza el narrador de *Cerbero son las sombras*, hacen factible la hipótesis de la existencia de una novelística del antifranquismo exenta de las deficiencias temáticas y técnicas del realismo postbélico, y que trascendiendo la especificidad histórica, se centraría en la expresión de problemáticas universales. Tal vez, esta novela de Juan José Millás se haya propuesto la representación literaria de este tránsito, de excepcional importancia para el futuro de la narrativa española contemporánea.

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Nota

[1] Todas las citas textuales se toman de *Cerbero son las sombras*, Madrid: Alfaguara, 1989. Las correspondientes páginas se ponen entre paréntesis al final de cada cita.

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Reception, Narration, and Focalization in Azuela's *Los de abajo*: Constructing and Reconstructing Azuela's Text

Nineteen ninety-six commemorates the eightieth anniversary of the first printing of *Los de abajo*.[1] Now, eight decades later, Mariano Azuela's novel of the Mexican Revolution is clearly one of the most important and representative works of the era. Luis Leal calls it "Azuela's masterpiece and one of the great Mexican novels", acknowledging Azuela as "Mexico's foremost novelist" (459).[2] Fittingly, the novel has since been widely analyzed by literary critics. In fact, John Brushwood notes that *Los de abajo* is "one of the most written-about books in the history of Spanish American Letters" (20). Still, despite the novel's critical popularity over the last eighty years, only Dick Gerdes has attempted an in-depth study of Azuela's narrative technique. Furthermore, while Gerdes' article offers several perceptive insights on point of view in *Los de abajo*, it avoids addressing one prominent, "innovative" facet of Azuela's narration, that of focalization. To this effect Gerdes writes:

> ...[R]ather than argue that the internal viewpoints of the characters within the novel create objectivity [the disappearance of the author], let us instead consider a "kind of omniscient stance in which the reader himself is placed at the —often shifting— narrative focus."[3] This new stance permits a justified tug-of-

> war between summary narrative (telling) and immediate scene (showing), between exposition and presentation, between narrative and drama and, as Friedman states, between idea and image. From this perspective, it does not appear that the story is *told* by the author or even by a character in the story, but rather that it is *seen* by the reader. What I hope to show, then, is that a "composite" visual point of view, similar to the effect produced in film, is created from some precise point, whether from the viewpoint of a character or not, that is, from the viewpoint of a person, either from inside the story or situated at some other particular stance. (557)

In other words, Gerdes really proposes that his readers heed Wolfgang Iser's invitation to scrutinize *Los de abajo* through the glasses of Reader-Response Criticism and Receptive Theory[4]— rather inventive ideas fifteen years ago when Gerdes chose to apply them to this novel. Still, Gerdes errs when he chooses to disregard the considerable role that focalization plays in creating the same cinematic effect in *Los de abajo* that he is attempting to account for in his article.

Reception Theory traces its roots back to the European camps of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Eagleton 54-90) associated with thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and E.D. Hirsch. It has continued into post-modernity with important works such as Roman Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art* (1973), Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading* (1978) and Umberto Eco's *The Role of the Reader* (1979), only to name a few. Receptionists, as implied in Iser's quotation, seek to explain the reasons an individual reader interprets a text the way he or she does. It logically follows that Reception Theory is intimately

connected with the modern field of Narratology which studies the narrative process, since both it (Narratology) and Reader-Response Criticisms scrutinize the reader's role in interpreting or reconstructing the text by building from the author's written outline while simultaneously merging it with the reader's personal repertoire in order to achieve an actualized treatment of the work.

In "Point of View in *Los de abajo*", Gerdes begins by exploring the sensation of completeness and direction an reader feels while studying Azuela's novel. Furthermore, he suggests that a definite focal point is discernible in and attributable to the narrator. However, in asking us to disregard the hyponarrative[5] level of the text (i.e., "the internal viewpoints of the characters within the novel" [557]), Gerdes essentially asks that we forget these obvious links between modern Narratology and Reception Theory. He also diminishes a leviathan portion of Azuela's artistry, ignoring many of the complex narrative structures that entitle *Los de abajo* to *artistic* and not just to *historical* criticism.

Reading is anything but a facile labor, and an author's using fiction to relay a thematic message to his reader is conceivably the most rhetorically circuitous mode of communication short of gossip. In fiction, the message filters through a long succession of narrative go-betweens. First, the author assumes a persona or demeanor for the particular work (an *implied* author [Booth 70-76]). Next, he invents a narrator and charges him with relaying the story (or *histoire* [Genette 71-76]) to the reader. The narrator in turn often delegates certain narrative tasks to specific characters within the text (*narration/focalization* [Rimmon-Kenan 94-95]). A reader begins with the aggregate of these narrative processes and reconstructs both the text and the author's message, passing them

through a complex web of personal knowledge and experience (*transformation* [Rimon-Kenan 10]) and arriving at his own reading or interpretation of the work (the *récit* [Genette 71-76]).[6]

Obviously, an author must compose a work meticulously if a reader is expected to come close to recovering the original message. For that reason, a reader may assume that the author has consciously decided to employ even seemingly insignificant details within the piece. Since Azuela chooses to employ multi-leveled narration in *Los de abajo,* each of these levels should be addressed in any explication of how a reader's vantage point becomes much like that of a movie viewer's. In "Point of View in *Los de abajo*", however, Gerdes confines his study only to the first narrative level, disregarding the deeper or hyponarrative plane and its effect on the receptive pole of the narrative process, where the author-reader informational exchange takes place. Beginning then with the reader and working backwards toward the author, Narratology helps us to notice some limitations inherent to Gerdes' evaluation of this novel.

First, Gerdes says he hopes to show that "a 'composite' visual point of view, similar to the effect produced in film, is created from some precise point… either from inside the story or situated at some other particular stance" (557). In a general sense, the narrator *always* supplies this focal point for the reader by definition: "[a] narrator [is] one who tells, or is assumed to be telling, the story in a given narrative. In modern analysis of fictional narratives, the narrator is the imagined 'voice' transmitting the story" (Baldick 146). In summary, the narrator provides a rhetorical framework for the account. In *Los de abajo* specifically, the narrator resorts to a deeper narrative level, allowing characters to describe as well as to show the action. Azuela's narrator

does this both implicitly (diegetic explication shown through the eyes of the characters but related by the narrator) and explicitly (mimetic use of the Dramatic Mode [*cf.* Gerdes 562] where characters both focalize and narrate the action). And, even though he delegates certain narrative duties to other characters in the novel, the narrator ultimately passes all information on to the reader from *his* vantage point because *he* mediates all discourse. In other words, following Gerdes' cinematic metaphor he acts as the director. In this way, the narrator becomes the "prime focalizer" at the diegetic or textual level, showing the action to the reader from his (the narrator's) rhetorical position— which is precisely the point Gerdes makes in his article. But both Gérard Genette and the American critic, Seymour Chatman, persistently contend that this panoramic feature of the narration is not the only possible viewpoint in the text but rather one of many. In fact, since this level is practically inevitable because of the narrator's role as spokesperson for the other participants in the story, many critics downplay this level of focalization categorizing it as "telling" the story (narrating), the simplest way of conveying the author's message, rather than "showing" it (focalizing). Gerdes, on the other hand, bases the work's overall effect on narration alone, mistakenly attributing the reader's response to the narrator's point of view and completely disregarding the importance of focalization to this narrative.

If one endorses Genette's tenets, this would be Gerdes' second inaccuracy (and also Norman Friedman's, upon whose work Gerdes bases his observations), for there is "an obvious confusion between the focal character and the narrator" (Genette 188). Genette notes that "most of the theoretical works on this subject (which are mostly classifications) suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call

mood and *voice*, a confusion between *Who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *Who is the narrator?*" (186, italics are Genette's). Chatman adds, "Point of view does *not* mean expression; it only means the perspective in terms of which the expression is made. The perspective and the expression need not be lodged in the same person" (153)— which is exactly what Gerdes attempts to do:

> I have sketched the variety of narrative viewpoints employed by Mariano Azuela in *Los de abajo*. These narrative stances produce a dramatic story with emotional impact.... Unlike almost all of his contemporaries, Azuela lets the reader experience parts of the novel in what Friedman calls Neutral Omniscience, Selective Omnipresence, and the Dramatic Mode. In effect, Azuela has integrated theme and narrative with amazing sophistication. He shifts from one point of view to another smoothly yet dramatically. (562)

Gerdes oversimplifies Azuela's artistry. Textual analysis of several segments from *Los de abajo* reveals that many forces operate concurrently with the narrator to furnish the reader with this feeling of intimacy toward the overall text. In chapter VIII of Part 1, for example, Azuela's narrator entrusts a large part of the narrative focalization to Camila and Luis Cervantes: "Luis Cervantes, otro día, apenas pudo levantarse. Arrastrando el miembro lesionado, vagó de casa en casa buscando un poco de alcohol, agua hervida y pedazos de ropa usada. Camila, con su amabilidad incansable, se lo proporcionó todo" (28).

In this episode, the narrator is evidently both showing and describ-

ing the tale very diagetically. Through his eyes we scrutinize Luis and Camila and by his omniscience we discover not only what Cervantes seeks (alcohol, boiled water, and scraps of rag), but also how he secures it. However, when we next see the two characters sit on the bed, the narrator begins to show the action from Cervantes' perspective. Later, he again alters his narrative style, resorting to the mimetic Dramatic Mode (by using dialogue) while Camila focalizes on Luis and his efforts to clean and sterilize his wounds. The reader, on the other hand, continues perceiving the actions from Cervantes' vantage point, watching Camila as she interrogates him regarding the task at hand:

> —¡Oiga, ¿y quién lo insiñó a curar?... ¿Y pa qué jirvió la agua?... ¿Y los trapos, pa qué los coció?... ¡Mire, mire, cuánta curiosidá patodo!... ¿Aguardiente de veras?... ¡Ande, pos si yo creiba que el aguardiente no más pal cólico era güeno!... ¡Ah!... ¿De moo es que usté iba a ser dotor?... ¡Ja, ja, ja!... ¡Cosa de morirse uno de risa!... ¿Y por qué no le regüelve mejor agua fría?... ¡Mi' que cuentos!... ¡Quesque animales en la agua sin jervir!... ¡Fuchi!... ¡Pos cuando ni yo miro nada!.... (28)

The reader cannot help but "hear" the echo of Camila's feral jargon just as Luis would, yet the focus has changed since we are seeing the action through Luis' eyes and not the narrator's. The reader further recognizes this variation when the narrator once again intercedes, briefly resuming responsibility for focalization: "Camila siguió interrogándole, y con tanta familiaridad que de buenas a primeras comenzó a tutearlo" (28).

This break is especially apparent because the narrator's previous imitation of Camila's language blatantly contrasts both his and

Cervantes' more educated, mellifluous styles. Later, when the narrator reenters the scene, diction and narrative style shift once more from staunch mimesis (the mimicry of Camila's country argot) to his eloquently diegetic tongue. Finally, the distinction is reiterated when the narrator again changes back to a mimetic, hyponarrational style, focalizing through Luis Cervantes:

> Retraído a su propio pensamiento, Luis Cervantes no la escuchaba más.
>
> "En dónde están esos hombres admirablemenhte armados y montados, que reciben sus haberes en puros pesos duros de los que Villa está acuñando en Chihuahua? ¡Bah! Una veintena de encuerados y piojosos, habiendo quien cabalgara en una yegua decrépita, matadura de la cruz a la cola. ¿Sería verdad lo que la prensa del gobierno y él mismo habían asegurado, que los llamados revolucionarios no eran sino bandidos agrupados ahora con un magnífico pretexto para saciar su sed de oro y de sangre?..." (29)

In juxtaposing Cervantes' and Camila's dialects we immediately see the striking disparity between Luis' educated usage and Camila's "country bumpkinisms." This contrast lets us "hear" Camila just as Luis would. The narrator's intervention bolsters this effect, reaffirming that Luis indeed is the focalizer: "Luis Cervantes no la escuchaba más" (29). Later, Azuela underscores this focalization by permitting *el curro* to slip into an interior monologue (set off by quotation marks), which again marks a change in both the narrative style and the focalization. Azuela artfully manipulates the account to highlight this focalization— while

the narrator's omniscience allows us to enter Cervantes' mind, we still perceive the story's action from Luis' vantage point. Finally, the same contrasts that helped to make Azuela's reader aware of these subtle changes in narrational style later help us to become more cognizant of the irony accompanying Camila's naively simple critique of Cervantes' medically modern treatments.

Progressing on through the chapter, we sense another shift in the narrative approach when Luis becomes so captivated by his own thoughts that he unwittingly thinks aloud:

> —No, lo que es ahora no me he equivocado— se dijo para sí, casi en voz alta.
>
> —¿Qué estás diciendo? —preguntó Camila—; pos si yo creiba ya que los ratones te habían comido la lengua. (29-30)

Camila focalizes on Cervantes while he recovers awareness of his surroundings. The narrator reappears, leaving the dialogue behind and returning to a third-person style of narration, though still focalizing through Luis who in turn watches and derisively describes Camila: "Luis plegó las cejas y miró con aire hostil aquella especie de mono enchomitado, de tez broncínea, dientes de marfil, pies anchos y chatos" (30).

As the narrator draws back, the secondary focalizers shoulder the burden of advancing the story: Camila while watching Cervantes walk away, and María Antonia while observing Camila. If this were a staged performance, the diegetic narration would be entirely unnecessary because the audience could easily witness for themselves the events which the narrator is describing:

> —¿Oye, curro, y tú has de saber contar cuentos?
> Luis hizo un gesto de aspereza y se alejó sin contestarla. Ella, embelesada, le siguió con los ojos hasta que su silueta desapareció por la vereda del arroyo. Tan abstraída así, que se estremeció vivamente a la voz de su vecina, la tuerta María Antonia, que fisgoneando desde su jacal, le gritó:
> —¡Epa, tú!... dale los polvos de amor... a ver si ansina cai...
> —¡Pior!... Ésa será usté...
> —¡Si yo quijiera!... Pero, ¡Fuche!, les tengo asco a los curros... (30)

Crediting the omniscient narrator with focalizing the characters' specific actions in this segment would be akin to attributing it to the author himself— perhaps a valid observation, though neither wholly accurate nor singularly weighty in exploring the work's effect on the reader. If Reception Theory is adamant about anything, it is the reality that all elements in the text perform together jointly and in conjunction with the antecedents a reader brings to the reading. Genette would reject Gerdes' suggestion that we exclude the characters' viewpoints and would emphasize the role that examining the unfolding action through their eyes at the work's hyponarrative level plays in supplying the reader with a superior sense of holistic cognition toward the story. Focalization is indispensable in Azuela's aesthetic creation and a component that makes transforming the material more "reader-friendly" by avoiding "he said, she said" narration and thereby allowing Azuela's readers to rely more on their own imaginations while interpreting the work.

But focalization in *Los de abajo* is responsible for more than merely allowing the reader to experience movie viewer-like participation in the work. Azuela punctiliously crafts a focal hierarchy which helps the reader to recreate the group's intrinsic social arrangement along with its ingenerate rules and codes. Generally, Azuela only allows the characters in the story to point out the flaws and deficiencies in personages with equal or lesser station in the group than they hold themselves. Meanwhile, the use of focalization helps the author to develop each of the individual characters more fully, introducing the reader to the other characters' conceptions of them. La Pintada, for example, represents the paragon of social slag— violently perverted womanhood. She focalizes on Camila, her equal in the band and her rival for Demetrio's affection. Likewise, she shows the reader el güero Margarito's rape of Cervantes' infant "fiancee," applauding her contemptible cohort's misconduct: "Ahora sí... ¡Cómo quiero yo a este güero!" (88).

On the other hand, Luis Cervantes spends excessive time in autofocalization— an extension of his own selfish interests in the Revolution. Although Luis is credited with introducing ideals to the ring, Azuela capitalizes on his condescending demeanor and opportunistic acts toward his unlettered, uncultivated *correligionarios* to paradoxically demonstrate Cervantes' hypocrisy and to ultimately make him a repugnant personality for the reader.

For her part, tender Camila draws the reader's attention to injustices executed by the revolutionaries: El Güero's continuous torment of the federal soldier, Cervantes' emotionally abusive assaults against her, the troops' unjustifiable plunder of the widower's provisions— illustrating that no single member of the group is entirely virtuous.[7]

Demetrio, like Camila, is given the specific assignment of studying the depravity of Luis and the other military officials. He likewise frequently looks inward, reflecting the circular nature of his character and paralleling the circular constitution of the entire work (*cf.* Leal 459-460; Brushwood 21-22) as his reason for fighting deteriorates from one of self-defense to a gluttonous search for fortune, power and position, then back to a more caring, humanistic viewpoint as he watches each of his original soldiers slaughtered in unnecessary battle.

Furthermore, the narrator (as the prime focalizer) shows a panoramic view of the *bola*'s widespread pollution as it moves away from the ideal and toward thoroughly immoral Pandemonium. In doing so, he allows the reader to watch each character's participation in this snowballing corruption, implicating every one taking part in the scene and therein calling into question the validity of the Revolution's "morality."

Of course, this power mapping within the group is not completely faultless. For instance, when Demetrio continues fighting without aim in Part III and therein shows his own moral degeneration, Azuela permits the wayward general's underlings to criticize their leader openly— something that only Valderrama, the crazy poet freed from social protocol by his own madness, had dared to do in previous chapters. Furthermore, Cervantes frequently takes advantage of his favored status[8] to lessen the customary distance between General Macías and his subordinates. Even Camila occasionally uses Demetrio's fondness for her to bridge this gap. Interestingly, Azuela is always very conscientious in not allowing these deviations from the norm threaten the group's internal order. The reader instinctively notes that these occurrences are exceptions to the rules, not amendments to them, and

directly attributes the anomalies to the general deterioration of the cause.

Finally, Azuela's orchestration of focalization at the narrative and hyponarrative levels of *Los de abajo* helps to present the work's main theme, best expressed in the final exchanges between Macías and his wife:

> —¿Por qué pelean ya, Demetrio?
> Demetrio, las cejas muy juntas, toma distraído una piedrecita y la arroja al fondo del cañón. Se mantiene pensativo viendo el desfiladero, y dice:
> —Mira esa piedra cómo ya no se pára.... (137)

The narrator makes this thematic assertion from a structurally ambiguous viewpoint: it is unclear whether it is the narrator, Azuela's implicit author or Demetrio Macías who has passed final judgement on the perpetual, profitless continuance of a Revolution that has failed to alter the destiny of *Los de abajo*, the so-called "underdogs." Azuela charges that regardless of Demetrio's end ("Demetrio Macías, con los ojos fijos para siempre, sigue apuntando con el cañón de su fusil..." [140]), the Revolution has little benefited him or the other men who have forfeited their lives in promoting the most recent *caudillo*'s rise to tyranny.

Leal designates *Los de abajo* as Azuela's "most carefully planned novel.... [In] *The Underdogs*, the reader finds an internal, organic order in which there are no loose scenes, no actions without a proper function in the apparently dissonant whole. As an organism, the novel is characterized by its dynamic essence, not only in the plot, but also in the style, in the painting of nature, and in the violent quality of the scenes"

(459-60). The narrative technique of focalization that Gerdes so painstakingly discards is in fact indispensable to presenting and to receiving both the story and Azuela's critique of the Revolution's relative failure to empower the peasantry. Moreover, focalization contributes to the novel's internal order, characterization, and tone. Azuela's artistry is evident in his deliberate narrative construction of *Los de abajo*. His attentive transitions between the narrator's point of view and the perspectives of individual characters within the text show the precision with which the author crafts his work in an effort to allow his readers to experience the cinematic-style intimacy with the story, the key to understanding Azuela's narration. Careful analysis shows that narrative point of view in fact merges with focalization —and a multitude of other techniques— in achieving a successful and satisfying reading of Mariano Azuela's literary classic, *Los de abajo*.

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Notes

[1] Of bibliographical interest to those who study the novel of the Mexican Revolution in general and *Los de abajo* specifically: recently, Azuela's family has asked that Luis Leal assist in compiling an extensive bibliography of secondary sources for *Los de abajo*, something that should be eminently useful in future studies of the novel.

[2] "If at first Azuela was not heard [with *Los de abajo*], he eventually became the foremost Mexican novelist. Azuela's novels have been widely read and his influence on subsequent generations of fiction writers has been considerable.... Since Azuela was the first Mexican writer to be widely read outside of his own country, he paved the way for acceptance of future Mexican novels as well as for those from other Latin-American countries. Due to his persevering innova-

tions and unrelenting efforts, the Latin-American novel today occupies a prestigious place in the world" (Leal 463).

[3] Here Gerdes quotes (but fails to cite) Morrissette 25-31.

[4] "...a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must therefore be examined through the eyes of the reader" (Iser 3-4).

[5] *cf.* Rimmon-Kenan; Bal 59-85. Paraphrasing, the diegetic level of narration is the first level of narration— the narrator's recounting the story. The hyponarrative level would be the next, deeper ("hypo" = "under") level of narration, a character's narration of certain events within the story.

[6] This concept is by no means a singularly "narrative" process. While the language used to describe this delivery of information from the artist to his or her public may vary, the idea is directly transferable to other, more poetic modes as well.

[7] Incidentally, Carlos Fuentes praises the book's innovation for having introduced ambiguous characters to the Latin-American novel: "los héroes pueden ser villanos y los villanos pueden ser héroes" (15).

[8] Demetrio looks up to both Venancio and Luis Cervantes because of their literacy. Although they are by no means more desirable characters because of their educations, they do enjoy a higher status within the group because they can read.

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Crítica y contracrítica: la retórica de la tradición crítica en hispanoamérica

Uno de los problemas que enfrenta la crítica hispanoamericana a partir de Yáñez es la conciencia de que nuestra literatura nace de una herencia y una pérdida. Ya desde las primeras crónicas, la descripción de "las cosas nunca antes vistas ni oídas", es decir, la fusión de lo "típicamente americano" en una lengua europea irá conformando un estilo que se distingue por una búsqueda: la búsqueda de un registro que refleje originalidad artística y pertenencia a una tradición; un estilo que se exprese a través de formas retóricas heredadas y no obstante se defina a partir de su diferencia.

La voluntad de estilo presente en el escritor americano se manifiesta, en nuestros críticos, generalmente a través de una pugna. Por una parte, el crítico conoce la necesidad del escritor americano de inscribirse en una tradición, y por otra, la conciencia de que la autenticidad del autor radica justamente en representar aquello que no pertenece a esa tradición.

La conciencia de esta paradoja ha llevado a nuestros críticos, a partir del modernismo, a buscar en la narrativa producida en la América no sajona un conjunto de rasgos que den coherencia y unifiquen la retórica del escritor latinoamericano bajo un mismo criterio. A esta suma de rasgos se la ha definido como "estilo"; el estilo americano.

La mayor parte de las veces, la búsqueda de ese registro único ha creído ser fructífera; los hallazgos de nuestros autores han sido descritos

por los críticos a través de conceptos que en términos retóricos son préstamos. De la prosa de Yáñez se ha dicho, por ejemplo, que tiene una "respiración única". Siguiendo esta lógica discursiva, Emmanuel Carballo ha dicho que la "respiración de Al filo del agua es fatigosa, monótona, [y que] el aire está enrarecido" (Martínez 50). En cambio, José Luis Martínez habla de la "tonalidad espiritual" de la prosa de Yáñez y encuentra que una de las grandes virtudes del lenguaje en *Al filo del agua* es su "temperatura".

A este estilo, es decir, al estilo que Yáñez propone en *La Creación* y que aplica en *Al filo del agua* se le dio, en su momento, un calificativo que desde entonces y gracias a la insistencia de Alejo Carpentier en *Tientos y diferencias*, marcará la identidad lingüística del estilo literario en América Latina. Me refiero al calificativo de "barroco".

Dice Fernando Benítez:

> Yáñez queda fundamentalmente como uno de los grandes escritores barrocos de nuestra época, su estilo es muy estimulante; yo lo veo como un gran altar del siglo XVIII, como un altar lleno de santos, de máscaras, de frutas, de sensualidad. Su color es un color que podría adjudicarse al ámbito de lo mexicano; sus fuerzas de gigante le alcanzan para describir con la misma pasión las tierras altas y desnudas de Jalisco que el festón de la costra tropical. (1)

En la descripción del estilo de la prosa de Yáñez hay cuando menos dos aspectos que saltan a la vista. Al asignarle un valor y una característica a este estilo (el calificativo "barroco") el crítico mismo echa mano de una prosa abundante en imágenes barrocas: "un gran altar del siglo XVIII",

"un altar lleno de santos, de máscaras, de frutas, de sensualidad". Pero no sólo las imágenes son barrocas. También los recursos retóricos que Benítez emplea para referirse a la prosa de Yáñez podrían ser catalogados como característicos del estilo barroco: ennumeración, paralelismo, profusión de imágenes, encabalgamiento.

En cierto modo, la de Benítez es una prosa acumulativa que produce el mismo efecto de riqueza y abundancia que la del Almirante en su *Diario de navegación*. Una prosa en la que hay implícita una idea de retribución.

Dice el texto de Cristóbal Colón:

> Esta isla es bien grande y muy llana y de árboles muy verdes y tiene mucha agua y una laguna en medio, sin ninguna montaña y toda ella verde que es un placer. (2)

Colón no se conforma con decir que la tierra que ha encontrado es grande y buena para el cultivo. Usa en cambio adverbios de cantidad ("muy" y "mucha") y refuerza la idea expuesta en la primera cláusula a través de la repetición. De la tierra dice primero que "es muy llana", y más tarde "sin ninguna montaña".

En cierta forma, esto no es distinto de lo que dice Benítez no a través de los conceptos mismos, sino de la forma de presentarlos. En términos de estilo, Benítez dice lo mismo que dice el Almirante; es decir, a través de su retórica describe la "realidad americana" del mismo modo en que lo hizo Colón en su *Diario*. Benítez usa el paralelismo como un recurso persuasivo pero también como una forma de producir la imagen mental de riqueza, de adición, mediante la repetición: "un gran altar del siglo XVIII" y luego "un altar lleno de santos".

El segundo aspecto interesante en la definición de este estilo consiste en la actitud que el escritor adopta ante el calificativo del crítico. Por lo visto, Yáñez parecía no estar muy de acuerdo con la definición que la crítica había hecho de su estilo. No sólo le parecía que el calificativo "barroco" no daba cuenta de las intenciones de su prosa sino que incluso tergiversaba el sentido de su búsqueda. Tras haber sido descrito como un autor barroco, Yáñez declaraba en entrevista:

> En el barroco muchos de los elementos son superficiales e innecesarios. El síntoma de lo barroco, en sentido peyorativo, es el ripio. Mi preocupación es la de dar vueltas en torno de una palabra, buscando el término más adecuado a la sugerencia y aun el sitio de colocación sintáctica para que de esa manera la expresión sea más eficaz. Quiero decir que esta actitud de celo y de escrúpulo en la lucha con la palabra revela mi aspiración de suprimir todo lo que sea vacuo o falso, y quedarme con lo que sea elemento de expresión auténtica. Mi preceptiva se compendia en dos términos: disciplina en busca de precisión (3).

Pese a las objeciones de Yáñez, los críticos insistieron en su empeño de definir la prosa del autor de *Al filo del agua* como "barroca". Con todo, a partir de la réplica del autor, la crítica se sintió obligada a explicar que "'barroquismo' no significa decoración superflua, pérdida o confusión de la arquitectura interior de la obra, y que, por lo contrario, la profusión que hay en este estilo es plenamente significativa" (Martínez 51).

El interés en identificar la prosa latinoamericana "auténtica" con lo barroco adquiere carta de identidad internacional con Alejo Carpentier.

Tientos y diferencias es la búsqueda del autor cubano de ese elemento autóctono, en términos de estilo, en las letras hispanoamericanas.

En el capítulo que se titula "De lo real maravilloso americano", Carpentier señala que después de haber viajado por la República Popular China, y después de haberse emocionado "gratamente" con las bellezas naturales del Islam —pero en cambio sentirse "humillado" ante su ignorancia de la lengua—, descubre que las únicas culturas inteligibles para él son la europea y la americana. No obstante, decide que aunque el *Quijote* le pertenece "de hecho y derecho", la crónica de Bernal Díaz del Castillo es "el único libro de caballería real y fidedigno que se haya escrito". Bernal, dice Carpentier, supera las hazañas de *Amadís de Gaula, Belianis de Grecia* y *Florismarte de Hircania*. En Bernal están las bases de la identidad cultural americana —"lo real maravilloso", "lo mágico"— y los rudimentos del estilo —la épica barroca—. Bernal es para Carpentier el primer escritor capaz de conjuntar lengua española y mestizaje cultural americano; es el primero en descubrir a Europa "un mundo de monarcas coronados de plumas de aves verdes, de vegetaciones que se remontaban a los orígenes de la tierra, de manjares jamás probados" un mundo, en fin, donde "los acontecimientos que ocupan al hombre suelen cobrar un estilo propio en cuanto a la trayectoria de un mismo acontecer" (114).

Alejo Carpentier describe su "encuentro con lo americano" en términos de una revelación. El crítico y autor cubano afirma que fue gracias a Paulina Bonaparte (su 'lazarillo' y 'guía') que vio la posibilidad de establecer ciertos sincronismos posibles en la noción de "lo americano". El encuentro de Paulina Bonaparte, del licántropo Mackandal, de la tiranía de Henri Christophe, todo en el marco de la exhuberancia vegetal de Haití lo ayudaron a encontrar ciertas constantes

americanas que más tarde enunciaría como constitutivas de un estilo.

Para contrastar la fuerza expresiva de dichas constantes, Carpentier se ve obligado a minimizar el arte moderno europeo, y así, compara "el nada mentido sortilegio de las tierras de Haití" con "la vieja y embustera historia del encuentro fortuito del paraguas y la máquina de coser sobre una mesa de disección" (116); pondera el arte del pintor cubano Wilfredo Lam "quien nos enseñara la magia de la vegetación tropical", sobre la "desconcertante pobreza imaginativa de Tanguy" quien, dice el crítico cubano, "desde hace veinticinco años pinta las mismas larvas pétreas bajo el mismo cielo gris" (118).

En el intento por definir las características de una cultura y un estilo, la retórica de Carpentier no es distinta de la del Almirante. Párrafo tras párrafo, el autor de Los pasos perdidos emula, acaso de manera no deliberada, la retórica de Colón. Mientras el Almirante dice haber visto sirenas y afirma estar muy cerca del paraíso, Carpentier declara, en sus ensayos, "haber hallado advertencias mágicas en los caminos rojos de la Meseta Central" (116) y afirma que en América "lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro)" y no, como en Europa, cuando es mero producto de una 'artimaña literaria' (119).

Así, para Alejo Carpentier —y después de él, para una larga lista de críticos latinoamericanos y hoy día para los críticos de las universidades estadounidenses cuyo campo de estudio es la narrativa latinoamericana— la novela americana es épica, la historia de América no es sino una crónica de lo real maravilloso y el estilo para describir esa crónica es una retórica maravillada y "barroca". A partir de *Tientos y diferencias* el estilo "típicamente latinoamericano" se caracteriza por la yuxtaposición de elementos y por la preferencia tópica e imagística del

universo de "lo tropical". La selva y sus productos son el topos imagístico proverbial en Rómulo Gallegos, José Eustasio Rivera, Miguel Angel Asturias, Guimaraes Rosa, Agustín Yáñez, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, y el estilo barroco, el elemento privilegiado de la prosa no sólo de estos autores sino sobre todo de los cubanos que consagraron esta forma de representación de América: Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, Cabrera Infante y el propio Carpentier, por mencionar sólo algunos de los más reconocidos dentro y fuera de latinoamérica.

Hoy por hoy ¿quién se atrevería a refutar la idea de que la prosa "típicamente latinoamericana" es barroca? ¿Quién podría negar que lo que autentifica a un autor típicamente latinoamericano es su estilo y que ese estilo es barroco?

Y sin embargo, no se necesita mucha suspicacia para darse cuenta de que el "barroquismo" de este estilo es, en buena medida, una creación del crítico. El carácter "barroco" de tantos de nuestros textos literarios revela tan sólo un elemento privilegiado del historiador de la literatura latinoamericana; aquello sobre lo que ha centrado el foco de atención y puesto un énfasis casi exclusivo. Del mismo modo en que el Almirante encontró en América sirenas, amazonas y tierras en forma de pecho de mujer porque eso es lo que quería encontrar, Benítez, Carballo y José Luis Martínez encuentran que el estilo de Agustín Yáñez, el primer autor mexicano en trascender el costumbrismo y hallar una voz "propia" es barroco. Pero detrás de ese "barroquismo" descrito tan endeblemente a través de analogías (recordemos aquí la comparación del estilo de Yáñez con el gran altar lleno de santos, etcétera) está la técnica del monólogo interior de Joyce y la técnica del collage o montaje de John Dos Passos en *Manhattan Transfer*. Desde una perspectiva analógica y no metafórica, el estilo de Yánez podría ser descrito, más

que como una duplicación del altar de santos, como una retórica basada en la técnica del montaje de Dos Passos, autor al que Yáñez había leído. De un modo similar al que emplea el autor norteamericano de la trilogía, Yáñez intercala noticias del periódico, oraciones y textos litúrgicos y, como señala el propio José Luis Martínez: "recoge variadas formas del lenguaje popular y del lenguaje específico de determinados oficios, y articula y yuxtapone sus escenas enlazándolas por medio de alusiones o evocaciones internas" (52).

En efecto, *Al filo del agua* responde al compromiso de la novela modernista según el cual el texto se asume como la búsqueda de un estilo que sea al mismo tiempo "expresión dramática" inserta en el canon de la tradición y "originalidad artística". Pero los términos en que se expresa la continuidad y la ruptura de nuestros autores son, en buena medida, —y aquí uso la imagen con que Henry James ilustra este problema en la literatura norteamericana— "los de ese ropaje europeo al que se pretende renunciar". El caso de los préstamos que Juan Rulfo y García Márquez hacen de Faulkner es ya proverbial. La enorme cantidad de tesis dedicadas al análisis de estas influencias es prueba de la conciencia de este fenómeno por parte de sus lectores. Algo semejante ocurre con Dos Passos y el Carlos Fuentes de La región más transparente y *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. Y con todo, el estilo narrativo de *Cien años de soledad* que hoy se prolonga en novelas que gozan de una enorme fortuna literaria en latinoamérica y fuera de ella (4), ese estilo heredero de los mejores momentos de Colón y de Bernal, de los libros de viajeros a mundos ignotos, un estilo que compendia la visión maravillada de América y sintetiza el realismo mágico latente en las primeras crónicas y explícito en obras como *As I Lay Dying*, de Faulkner o *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, de Elena Garro, ese estilo es, sin duda, el único que los lectores

europeos y norteamericanos estarían dispuestos a reconocer como "típicamente latinoamericano" o, más aún, como el único estilo legítimo cuando de representar "la realidad" latinoamericana se trata.

Al establecimiento de este criterio ha contribuido, en buena medida, la postura de nuestros críticos. Su función ha sido más que ancilar en la conformación del canon y las expectativas del lector de la "nueva novela latinoamericana". Aunque la asignación del término "barroco" para la narrativa latinoamericana contemporánea comienza, en México, con Yáñez, y adquiere un carácter continental con Carpentier, es hasta 1962, año de publicación de *La casa verde*, de Mario Vargas Llosa, a quien se le otorga el Premio de la crítica en España, seguido de *Cien años de soledad*, de García Márquez, también premiado en España, que comienza a estudiarse la novela latinoamericana como un corpus unificado donde la crítica cree ver constantes temáticas y retóricas y asigna a esta narrativa un valor y una continuidad.

La historia de "la novela latinoamericana", como si de un sólo texto se tratara, continúa con Conversaciones en la catedral (1970); *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973); *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira* (1972) y *Cobra*, de Severo Sarduy, del mismo año; *Concierto barroco* (1974) —en 1977 se entrega el Premio Cervantes a Carpentier— *Terra Nostra* de Fuentes, 1975 y *El otoño del patriarca*, de García Márquez, del mismo año, y con otras tantas novelas reconocidas fuera de América Latina a las que se otorgaron los premios "Biblioteca breve", "Nadal", y el Premio de la crítica. Entre algunas de las novelas premiadas en España que contribuyeron a la conformación del canon se cuentan El obsceno pájaro de la noche, de José Donoso (1971) y *Un mundo para Julius*, de Alfredo Bryce Echenique, del mismo año; *Persona non grata*, de Jorge Edwards (1973) y *Memorias de Altagracia*, de Salvador Garmendia

(1974).

De más está decir que es el primer bloque de obras citadas, es decir, el conjunto de textos que presentan una visión maravillada de América el que ha pasado a formar parte de un canon que excluye otros proyectos de representación. Estas son las obras que se leen y se antologan cuando en el extranjero se pretende dar una "muestra representativa" de nuestra literatura.

La apertura y aceptación de estos autores fuera de América Latina y concretamente en España durante la década de los 60 y 70 obliga a la crítica extranjera a enfocar sus intereses hacia esta literatura a la que se da un mismo carácter geopolítico y se engloba bajo un estilo: es la novela latinoamericana y es barroca. No importó que muchos de los autores españoles de esas mismas décadas adoptaran algunos de los recursos estilísticos de la narrativa latinoamericana, ni que muchas de las cualidades que comenzaron a "descubrirse" en autores antes desdeñados en España como Juan Benet (*Una meditación*) o Alvaro Cunqueiro tuvieran una estrecha relación, en términos de retórica, con el famoso "barroquismo" latinoamericano.

El resultado del corpus crítico de esos años marcó a la literatura producida de este lado del mundo por todo lo que resta del siglo: y así, la novela latinoamericana, la gran novela latinoamericana, cuando menos la novela latinoamericana que se quiere leer en el extranjero es épica, es barroca y mejor aún, es tropical. Al margen de las grandes novelas latinoamericanas cuyo asunto central gira en torno a una familia, a un grupo social o a una estirpe maldita y cuyo estilo no está exento de cierto virtuosismo técnico y de un carácter mágico o fantástico es, cuando menos sospechoso, que no haya existido ni exista aún el interés por establecer una línea alterna o paralela al supuesto "barroco

tropical" (empleo aquí un término de Raúl Quesada, muy atinado, a mi juicio, para designar esta tendencia estilística) . Una línea crítica que explique de qué modo el estilo de los réprobos, es decir, de los autores no insertos en el realismo mágico o en la porción "tropical" del Boom es también latinoamericano y cuál es la trayectoria que sigue dentro de una tradición y una lengua. Es decir, un análisis que juzgue de qué modo estas "otras" obras se insertan también en una tradición temática y retórica que se opone a la anterior y que como ella, nace como un deseo de pertenencia y vinculación con la tradición y a la vez, de originalidad.

La preocupación por el estilo, el interés literario de nuestros críticos y la búsqueda del lenguaje que, en términos de Alfonso Reyes refleje el "alma nacional" —del país, del continente— han obedecido a parámetros ajenos o refractarios a la sistematización de un discurso objetivo y "científico". Es decir, estos intereses han estado estrechamente ligados a una preocupación por transmitir "un juicio implícito o explícito sobre la realidad que nos circunda" es decir, una ética (Paz 147).

Estamos concientes de que la subversión de un canon conlleva, necesariamente, la conformación de otro, sin duda también cuestionable. Lo que aquí se propone no es la descalificación de una lectura sobre la identidad real o supuesta, del estilo latinoamericano, sino en todo caso, la descalificación de la exclusividad de un discurso que ha permeado una visión y ponderado un conjunto de obras en detrimento de otras. Aunado a los otros trabajos en torno a la función retórica de la crítica hispanoamericana lo que se añora es una crítica ejercida menos como una profesión de fe o una religión y más como un instrumento analítico y desvelador que contemple y reditúe en beneficio no de las obras más rentables sino de la conformación de un canon literio al margen, si esto es posible, de las leyes de mercado.

¿Qué argumentos son los que legitiman que las obras insertas en el canon del barroco tropical y el realismo mágico sean "más auténticamente" latinoamericanas que las de aquellos autores que han querido dar una visión alterna o cuando menos distinta, de América: Borges, Cortázar, Onetti, Augusto Roa Bastos, Rulfo, Arreola? ¿Por qué una obra como *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, de Elena Garro, clarísimo antecedente del realismo mágico es rara vez citada y nunca, por cierto, en relación con esta línea tópica y retórica? ¿Qué hacemos con los autores no latinoamericanos en los que son claros el "barroquismo" o la literalización de las metáforas y de los elementos fantásticos, i.e., el realismo mágico? ¿Cuál es la aportación de muchas de las obras posteriores al Boom que adoptan los recursos discursivos del realismo mágico con excelentes resultados en términos de recepción (Luis Sepúlveda, *Un viejo que leía historias de amor*; Isabel Allende, *La casa de los espíritus*; Laura Esquivel, *Como agua para chocolate*) y en qué medida se corre el riesgo, de caer en una retórica solipsista si de hablar de "nuestra" realidad se trata? Y por último ¿hasta qué punto podríamos pensar que la expresión "auténtica" de nuestra literatura no es el resultado del "excedente" europeo y norteamericano, es decir, que la selva, el bananal, el sincretismo, el buen salvaje y los milagros son el referente idóneo de la utopía, el deseo de occidente de dar a aquello de lo que carece un domicilio preciso?

A veces me gusta pensar, junto con O' Gorman, que América es después de todo el resultado de un sueño europeo. Ni duda cabe: un sueño portentoso cuyo filón es más rentable y relumbra más que el oro del Almirante. Es innegable valor de las obras que se insertan en esta tradición. Lo extraño es que la crítica que las explica siga empeñada en perorar el divorcio de su cónyuge al tiempo en que se obstina en soñar

su mismo sueño y dormir en la misma cama.

—**Rosa Beltrán**
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Notas

1. "Yáñez visto por Fernando Benítez", *Revista Mexicana de Cultura,* Suplemento de *El Nacional,* México, 11 de octubre de 1964, núm. 915, p. 5.

2. Cristóbal Colón, *Diario de navegación* (1451-1506).

3. Yáñez citado por E. Carballo en: J.L. Martínez, *La obra de Agustín Yáñez,* México, Universidad de Guadalajara, 1991, p.51.

4. *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* de Luis Sepúlveda; *La casa de los espíritus,* de Isabel Allende y *Como agua para chocolate,* de Laura Esquivel, entre los casos más sonados.

Book Reviews

CROS, EDMOND. ***D'un sujet à l'autre: sociocritique et psychanalyse.*** **Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, Editions du CERS, 1995.**

Edmond Cros is professor at the Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier, where he also directs the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Sociocritiques. Professor Cros began his career as a specialist in Golden Age studies, with a monumental *thése d'Etat* on the picaresque *Guzmán de Alfarache* and a rhetoric of seventeenth-century sermonizing (Paris: Didier, 1967). This was followed by the very useful *Mateo Alemán: Introducción a su vida y a su obra* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1971). Some time ago he widened his focus to include Latin American literature, especially Mexican, as well. He has become well known as a theoretician and practitioner of "sociocritique", a form of cultural studies concerned with the relations between literature, ideology and society. In general, Cros has been fascinated by the interplay of social and literary semiotics, in a series of essential works that have followed and at least partially incorporated the evolution of European socio-literary theorizing. Bakhtin's influence is apparent in his 1975 study of Quevedo's picaresque *Buscón: L'aristocrate et le carnaval des gueux*, which explores the usurpation of social roles and status by *pícaros* and criminals as a version of carnival. The overt Bahktinian reference is replaced by ideology in the revised and rearranged Spanish translation, *Ideología y genética textual. El caso del "Buscón"* (Madrid: CUPSA, 1980). Cros combined theoretical speculation and practical analysis in *Théorie et pratique sociocritiques* (Montpellier: CERS, 1983), published in English translation as *Theory*

and Practice of Sociocriticism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), and with the same focus but different organization and some different examples, as *Literatura, ideología y sociedad* (Madrid: Gredos, 1986). These volumes incorporate and systematize specific studies published principally in Cros' Montpellier journal *Imprévue* . The theory is concerned with notions of social semiotics and how the social signs are represented in literary texts. Cros has always displayed a predilection for systems, codes and taxonomies, inspired ultimately by Saussurean linguistics. The practice returns again and again to texts by Mateo Alemán (principally *Guzmán de Alfarache*) and Quevedo (principally the*Buscón*), joined now by Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz, now by Howard Hawks and Orson Welles.

The present trendily-titled volume, where the double sense of a*utre* is concealed by the resolute imperium of upper-case typface, is a collection of essays grouped around the notion of the "cultural subject", which Cros defines in the first chapter. The functioning of the cultural subject is then worked out in a series of examples spanning time and space from early modern Spain and America to the contemporary scene, but with a preference for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century themes and texts: a Buñuel film; the star system; the colonial subject; the Old Christian; the Abencerraje; Mateo Alemán. The last three chapters return to theory: postmodernity; history in literature; materialism and literary discourse.

Most of these are the socio-literary themes Cros has dealt with before, to which he returns from a different vantage point inspired by French linguistics in combination with his most recently acquired theoretical weapon, Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Cros works with Louis Althusser's notion of ideology and ideologi-

cal interpellation in combination with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the h*abitus*. The recourse to Lacan and psychoanalysis in general might be considered an attempt to introduce the missing notion of the unconscious into Althusser's and Bourdieu's schemes.

Culture is defined as "the ideological space whose objective function consists in anchoring a collectivity in the consciousness it already has of its own identity" (1) (rather like Erik Erikson's definition of identity). Culture cannot exist in the abstract. Like ideology, and like language, it can only exist in its particular realizations: language and discursive practices, a particular ensemble of social institutions and practices, its reproduction in individual subjects according to certain forms generalizable regardless of the particular culture in question. The concept of subjectivity as the product of language, and the notion that the pronoun "I" can refer only to discourse, is derived from Benveniste. What Cros calls "the cultural subject", then, combines: a discursive instance defined by "I", the appearance and function of a subjectivity, a collective subject, a process of ideological subjectification (1). The cultural subject is "an instance which subsumes all the individuals of a given collectivity so that its fundamentally ideological character remains visible" (2). In the notion of the cultural subject Cros offers a personal, somewhat idiosyncratic variation on the methodology of "mentalities and forms of representation" that the A*nnales E.S.C.* school has imposed on French cultural studies with such positive results.

Langue and *parole.* Cros remarks the same duality in Freud: an unconscious *langue* with universal symbols, vocabulary and syntax opposing a *parole* peculiar to each individual subject. In a dream the dreamer realizes a universal unconscious *langue* with its syntactic rules

etc. through a series of particular images and imagined events. But this unconscious symbolic system isn't limited to dreams; it has a history, and is present in all popular collective representations: folklore, myths, legends, sayings, proverbs, puns. This was already observed by Benveniste. So there is both a timeless-universal and a historical-specific dimension to cultural practice and consequently to cultural subjectivity. With the aid of Benveniste glossing Freud, Edmond has rediscovered Aristotle's poetic universal-historical particular dichotomy! This brings him more or less effortlessly to Lacan's famous observation that the unconscious is structured like a language, with its vocabulary and syntactical rules. From here he steps easily to Lacan's equally famuous observation concerning the substitution of the Law of the Father, concretely in the form of the *Nom (Non) du Père* , for the father's phallus as signifier, the acquistion of language and simultaneous entry into the Symbolic Order and into Culture. The "cultural subject", as opposed to the "desiring subject", is the result of, can only be realized through, the already enunciated (that "network of signs organized into trajectories of sense and ideologically traced which is generally designated by the name 'culture'" p. 7). The subject of desire, on the contrary, can only be realized in the form of an enunciation. Cros summarizes: "In the cultural subject, *je* is confused with all the others; the *je* is the mask of all the others" (9). So what we're talking about here is the presence of tradition, ideology, habitus etc. speaking through an "I" who sincerely (maybe) believes he's saying something original. Or does the cultural subject know that he is merely the mask his culture is hiding behind? This question is answered by recourse to Lacan's Imaginary Order, the product of the *stade du miroir* , which Cros summarizes by saying that "in the Mirror Stage the *Moi* is formed, in

effect, by the image of the other, the *Moi* is a concentration of images sent by the other" (11). Cros' study of Mateo Alemán's self-portrait (ch. VII) will be based on this dynamic. The self is always in a rivalry with its own ideal (reflected) image. This situation gives rise to what Lacan calls "la plus intime aggressivité", and which will lead to the universal desire for the other's disappearance (11). Cros' study of Antonio de Nebrija (ch. V) will be based on this dynamic. Lacan's *idéal du Moi* (as opposed to the *moi idéal*) mediates between the *moi* and the *moi idéal* . This *idéal du Moi* is formed by the internalization of the symbolic traits inscribed in the given culture, that is, by the introjection of that instance Cros calls the "cultural subject" (12). It is the cultural subject, then, which acts as intermediary between the *moi* and the other. Cros' study of the Abencerraje (ch. VI) will be based on this dynamic. The chivalresque values incarnated in both Abindarráez and Rodrigo de Narváez constitute the structure of mediation through which the two "fraternal enemies" recognize themselves in each other. Cros concludes this chapter with a trip through Lacan's dialectic of the Subject, the other (i.e. the reflected self or ideal self), the consequent creation of the *moi* , the subject's subsequent perception of real Others (*Autre* or *objet grand A* in Lacanian) doubly mediated through a) the subject's own ego-ideal and b) the "wall of language" (12-14). Cros' study of the colonial subject (ch. IV) will illustrate this process of alienation through language, which renders the Other unrepresentable.

Chapter II introduces what Cros calls the "cultural text", by analogy with the cultural subject, a fragment of an intertext so widely diffused and so thoroughly assimilated as to present itself as "a common possession from which all the original marks of identification have disappeared" (17). The cultural text is realized only "as reproduced

within a cultural object, as an underlying semiotic organization visible only sporadically and fragmentarily" (17). Another era might have called them archetypes. The stories of Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, along with the temptations of Christ by the Devil and of Adam by Eve and the Serpent all constitute such cultural texts, and Cros teases out their presence in Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961). He works out an analogy between the fragmentary presence of these cultural texts, including their deeper, more troubling thematics that psychoanalisis has brought to light, within the larger filmic text of *Viridiana*, with its unique images and episodes, and the presence of the universal language of the unconscious within a dream composed of unique images and episodes.

Chapter III is a discussion of the star system in the movie biz. In the star system the actor is privileged over the character and is even considered responsible for the film in the mind of the public, but in fact the actor is manipulated and objectified by the director and is ultimately present in the film only as an absence. The mechanisms of the system work to conceal the real relationships between the actor/object and the other agencies. The fan magazines project an image of the star as an ordinary mortal with a private life, thus encouraging the public to identify with their idol. At the same time, however, the idol remains inaccessible. This tension between identification and inaccessibility makes the star system a model ideological product insofar as on the one hand it creates the impression that we can identify with our idol and the conditions of her life while it conceals the objective conditions of her socio-economic insertion, and on the other hand insofar as in order to remain an idol she must remain inaccessible, the system reinforces the perception of the star as star. Most of this is not new with Cros. He

contributes, by way of illustration, two contrasting films ads from Monterrey, México in 1936. One allows the reader to posit the star in the role of *auteur* and the other buries the star in a welter of references to sources, real authors, other cultural productions and so on. The point, I believe, was to demonstrate that the ambiguity in our perception of the star antedates the star system itself, whose beginning Cros traces (mistakenly) to the 1960's. Fatty Arbuckle, where are you?

Chapter IV brings back the halcyon days and heady polemics of 1992. The subject here is the colonial cultural subject, a new way of explaining what might uncharitably be termed the perpetual Latin American identity crisis. This essay incorporates work by Rolena Adorno among others. Cros begins by showing how Colón expresses the unknown in terms of the already known in a letter to Santángel. Alterity is assimilated to the similar. The indigenous peoples too are engaged in a symmetrical process of recognizing in the Other the signs that would permit assimilation to their existing categories: Cortés is assimilated to Quetzalcoatl; Spanish ecclesiastics are seen as *tzitzimime* or monsters, which are in turn assimilated to the fallen angels of Christianity. The representation of the diabolical is assimilated to that of the divine, and that of the divine into the diabolical (51). Christian images are integrated into the indigenous imagination, where they take on new contours. Autochthonous and allogenous figures mutually deconstruct each other and explode the existing or original interpretative grids, leading to the creation of hybrid products that correspond to the practices generally termed syncretic (52). But the syncretism is only apparent. The result of this new discursive instance is the colonial cultural subject: "condemned to project itself in terms of the similar and the dissimilar, condemned to internalize its own alterity and therefore

to be in perpetual search of itself insofar as alterity is unrepresentable since the identification of the Other can only be effected in terms of my own discursive models which are in turn the products of who I am, what I know or what I imagine. Hence the inability of my discursive models to represent anything outside myself" (53). This is a restatement of the Lacanian dialectic of the mirror stage that Cros resumes in Chapter I, without the references to the theory, which might have helpfully simplified the exposition here. One gets the impression that the essay was perhaps written before the acquisition of the psychoanalitic theory.

The question of the meaning of 1492 is the point of departure in Chapter V, which is concerned with the cultural subject that will emerge from Antonio de Nebrija's prologue to his grammar and the cultural policies it prefigured. In what is perhaps the most genuinely psychoanalytical moment of this book, Cros seizes on an apparently insignificant anomaly and teases out its full significance. What to make, he asks, of the fact that Nebrija's grammar is simultaneously supposed to raise Castilian to the level of Latin and be the language of a new empire teaching the laws of the conqueror to the vanquished, and at the same time be a tool to facilitate the acquisition of Latin? Castilian is at once hegemonic and subordinate. The apparent inconsistency points to the realities of the administrative organization of a State and its daily operations. The laws in question may be written in Castilian, but the teaching of Law is entirely in Latin, and knowledge of Roman Law (the Law) presupposes a perfect command of Latin. Nebrija's prologue suggests the figure of the l*etrado* , the educated son of Old Christian peasant stock who would constitute the new administrative class of the new empire. In this sense, Nebrija's prologue transcribes the birth

certificate of the modern Nation State. At the same time, Cros notes, this emergence of the modern state is accompanied by a discourse of exclusion, which "projects the contours of the Castilian cultural subject at the dawn of the modern era" (63). Within Nebrija's text, references to body, unity, joining, assembly and the like are opposed by references to dismember, dissolve, distribute and sunder. What separates the assimilable from the non-assimilable, argues Cros, is religion, which confirms the theocratic underpinnings of the new imperial project. The cultural subject which emerges from this situation is founded upon the concepts of purity and exclusion, and bodied forth in the figure of the Old Christian, whose identity consists in the absence of Muslim or Jewish forebears (72). As an old Castronian I am not going to argue with Cros about the significance of *limpieza de sangre* and the emergence of the (male) Old Christian as the paradigmatic figure of the New Order, but (as an old Castronian) I would place ethnicity before religion.

Chapter VI, on the novella of the Abencerraje, the story of enemies who become friends, begins as an exercise in close reading and linguistic-thematic analysis. Without recourse to any theorizing, either ideological or psychoanalytical, Cros demonstrates the ubiquitous presence of structures and instances of mediation: between a love story and a war story, between Christians and Muslims, between fortresses and perfumed gardens. It has been customary at least since I was an undergraduate to remark as well the presence of an underlying system of chivalric values to which both Muslims and Christians subscribe. Cros too emphasizes this bond. The text has also been considered a kind of plea for intercaste *convivencia* around the middle of the sixteenth century. Cros goes further, and posits instead of *convivencia* an absolute identification of Christian and Muslim, with an opportune reference to

the old Spanish saying "mi amigo es otro yo." And here is where the trouble begins, and where Cros' analysis invokes psychoanalitic theory to explain the ambiguity inherent in any identification of the subject with the Other: "the Other is my double, but let us be on guard against Utopias," he warns (82). He invokes Lacan's analysis of the subject's specular identification with the Other through his image of himself as the site of that "plus intime agressivit," that converts the Self/Double into a rival and an enemy. Concluding his analysis, which has now deconstructed the traditional readings of the Abencerraje story, Cros locates the text and its multiple versions (1565-1577) and adaptations (1596-1597), in the historical context of renewed hostility between Christians and Muslims: the revolt of the Alpujarras (1568-1570) and subsequent harsh repression, and the expulsion of the moriscos (1609). Read as he reads it, the text poses questions concerning the function of identificatory discourse in a context of socio-historical crisis, and the more general relations among self-examination, narcissism and paranoia.

Mateo Alemán had a self-portrait engraved on a copper plate he used to carry around with him and had printed as the frontispiece of all his published writings. Edmond Cros has been studying and writing about it since the mid-1960's. This is the densest analysis he has produced. The relationship between Mateo Alemán and his fictional character/narrator Guzmán de Alfarache is complex and suggestive to say the least. Their lives share certain concrete episodes, but especially general attitudes and preoccupation with certain psychic and social themes: the division of wealth and power in society, the social organization of charity, the crisis of capitalism, *otium* (*cum* or *sine dignitate*) and purposeful activity, wisdom and blindness, acting and narrating,

and the problem of *linaje* , to mention just a few. The portrait is the site of their presence, crossing, and recrossing. Cros takes us on a guided semiotic tour of the portrait, divided into its top, central and lower parts, showing how, for example, the rigorously historical (maybe) Alemán family blason in the upper left opposes the vignette of the spider and the serpent in the upper right, derived from and present in the fictional narrative, how the figure of Alemán in the center unites the "where I (Alemán) come from" of the blason with the "who I (Guzmán) was" of the vignette, and how consequently Alemán becomes identified with the fictional narrator/character of his novel. This narrator is obsessed with the imaginary relationship he posits with his reader, with the image he is projecting of himself as he narrates and with the reader's reaction to it. This dialectic too is present in the portrait. Alemán is simultaneously contemplating himself, in an implied mirror, and us contemplating him. The situation of the portrait, then, reproduces the psychic environment in which the *Moi* is formed and invites a Lacanian analysis. Probably because Cros has already described the process in some detail, this analysis is limited to noting the presence of the *Nom du Père* in the family blason.

After a nod/feint in the direction of Julia Kristeva, chapter VIII proposes a redefinition of the term i*déologème* in light of the notion of the cultural subject. The ideologeme for Cros is "a semiotic-ideological microsystem underlying a functional and significative unit of discourse" (105). Although the essay is essentially a bleak definition and description of postmodernity, and makes abundant use of Fredric Jameson and Joan Lluis Marfany, it takes as its point of departure the proliferation in recent French discourse of "patrimonies" of all kinds. This leads Cros to conduct a mini-diachronic survey of the term and its

meanings. After relating "patrimony" as ideologeme to notions of permanence, stability, the *Nom de Père* and "culture" in general, he takes up the question of its sudden ubiquity by considering it in relation to another ideologeme, "postmodernity". There is a concise discussion of the conceptual differences between modernity and postmodernity, after which Cros zeroes in on postmodernity as the consequence of a process of homogenization that coincides with the third industrial revolution following World War II and the last phase of the expansion of international capitalism. "It is clear," he writes, "that this process of homogenization, which began in the so-called advanced countries and now extends to the third world, constitutes the essential factor in what we call postmodernity" (118). Postmodernity as ideologeme is defined as the internalization by the cultural subject of a vision of the future defined by the endpoint of a mass march toward total socio-economic and socio-cultural homogeneity.

Chapter IX takes up the vexing question, kicked around by Aristotle and Cervantes, to mention only two of the most expert kickers, of history and literature, and of the study of history and literature. After clarifying that historical research is just as dependent on texts as is literary criticism, the discussion finally centers on the literary text as a source of historical information. Cros proposes a semiotic, as opposed to a positivistic reading strategy. He assumes knowledge of the Kristevian p*henotext* (objective, printed) and *genotext* (generated by the reader). The trick is to know how to construct the socio-historical context (genotext) from the phenotext by paying attention to founding structures and what he calls "the entire semiotic ensemble". He offers four examples: a dialectic of exposure vs. concealment in *Los olvidados* , which, he claims, demonstrates "how an entire semiotic network is

generated by this founding structure" (125); a dialectic of positive vs. negative figurations of the father and the question of filiation in *El periquillo sarmiento* , which demostrates how the "reformist project of the Enlightenment calls into question the predominance of physiocratic and anti-monetarist discourse as well as the project of Latin American economic independence, that is, crucial problems, central preoccupations of societal interplay characteristic of the first decades of the nineteenth century in Mexico" (126); a mediated dialectic of sin vs. salvation in the *Libro de buen amor* ; and finally a double dialectic of transgression vs. respect for the norm and transition vs. immobility in *Cumand* , which allows one to see that "for the transindivual subject, the cyclical, that is, the return to the political situation that was ended by the assassination of García Moreno, passes through the stages of civil disobedience and transgression of that conservative Catholic orthodoxy which is the fundamental value of that same transindividual subject" (127). My old philosophy professor would say that if these examples were syllogisms, they all lack a distributed middle term. Or any middle term.

The book does not end with a bang; the last chapter's title promises more than any ten pages could deliver. The questions raised at the beginning are fundamental and daunting: how does the social inscribe itself in the text? in what forms? by what means? And how does it function? Is there a relation between the volume of social information and the degree of literariness and esthetic value? After a brief discussion of Lucien Goldmann and the limitations of "genetic structuralism", and of Bakhtin and the vulgarization of his thought by, among others, Julia Kristeva, Cros offers his own contribution to a materialist poetics. He would insist on the semiotic processes described in the

preceding essay, he would retain the notion of history and society as discursive practices which generate others, he would insist on internal contradiction and dialectic as a structuring and meaning-producing principle, and he would insist equally on the notion of polyphony, restored to its full Bakhtinian meaning. The emphasis on multiplicity of voices and points of origin, he concludes, privileges the notions of criture and text over those of consciousness and authorial intention.

D'un sujet à l'autre demonstrates the breadth of Cros' reading, especially of literary texts; he moves with admirable facility from Nebrija to Buñuel. I applaud the effort to enrich socio-cultural analyses by incorporating the Lacanian *jeu de miroirs* and the contradictory constitution of the subject. Unfortunately, the closing essay's tendency to telegraphic abstraction does not do justice to the rigor and richness of analyses Cros has conducted elsewhere using the techniques he only hints at here. For a nuts-and-bolts demonstration of how the social enters and functions in a literary text, and how the attentive study of a literary text enriches our historical knowledge, Cros' 1975 study of the *Buscón* (or its 1980 Spanish version) remains exemplary.

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PERELLI, CARMEN. ***Las ratas en la torre de Babel: La novela argentina entre 1982 y 1992.*** **Santos Dumont: Letra Buena, 1994.**

The enterprise of establishing a critical discourse on recent literary history — that is, on living authors, and works about which little has

been written — is one of the hardest challenges a critic can face. Particularly in times of transition such as the end of the millennium, when the collapse of military dictatorships in Latin America has produced a new artistic climate and ambiguous new fictional forms, the attempt to make a first sketch, a first map of the territory, is fraught with risk for the critic. The other option calls seductively: that of treating a canonical author; nothing easier, for instance, than electing to write a new book on Cortázar if one is a student of Argentine literature. Yet that is not the route that Carmen Perilli chooses in *Las ratas en la torre de Babel: La novela argentina entre 1982 y 1992.*

Perhaps it is because of the risks involved that Ms. Perilli approaches her subject with such a forbidding array of critical theory. She often refers to the works in question only obliquely, preferring to speak of them theoretically in terms of the themes and patterns they exemplify as a group. It is as though, by presenting her observations in a salad of irreproachable theoretical concepts, she can forestall the rebuttals that an early critical assessment inevitably generates. In the first section of the book especially, in which she places the work of Andrés Rivera, Osvaldo Soriano, Tomás Eloy Martínez, Juan Martini, Tununa Mercado, Antonio Marimón, Ricardo Piglia, Jorge Asís and a whole gamut of others within Argentine literary history, and then goes on to identify the main postmodern characteristics of their collective project, Perilli expounds her theoretical framework almost to the exclusion of any mention of works or authors. She remedies this to some extent in the two remaining sections where she address the novels of Juan Martini and Andrés Rivera, two literary practitioners who "nos servirán para ilustrar dos extremos de un amplio arco de novelistas" (58).

The first part of the book contains valuable observations despite its

overly general quality. In Perilli's hands, for instance, the literary history of Argentina (presented in chapters one and two) takes on a new vitality and a conceptual unity sure to prove useful to future scholars. Then too, among quotidian critical concepts like the dichotomy between *letra* and *cuerpo* — basic equivalents to *civilización* and *barbarie* — we find a chapter naming *lo siniestro* as "el efecto central del discurso narrativo de la última década" (47). This intriguing notion, which derives from Kant and from Freud, finds fertile ground in contemporary Argentina with its heritage of the Dirty War — a society in which, the author insists, politics takes on the tinge of irreality. *Lo siniestro* exists on the frontier between reality and irreality, life and death. It comprises that part of the familiar which is strange or other. Our reaction is one of revulsion. Through *lo siniestro*, fiction can express all that which is or has been officially repressed — "las imágenes nucleares del discurso cultural son las de la degradación y la muerte. Lo excremental está omnipresente..." (51). *Lo siniestro* constitutes a key technique through which contemporary fiction gives voice to the forced silences of recent history.

Perilli deserves applause for the honesty and the objectivity with which she treats her themes. Though an academic at an Argentine university, she never falls into literary patriotism. For example, she admits with utter objectivity, neither condemning nor praising but simply identifying a truth, that Argentine literary discourse "niega cualquier parecido con el resto de la producción literaria de América, negación que es una marca nítida de nuestra cultura. Se trata de una producción enclavada en el sistema central que ignora la periferia" (37).

In the remaining two sections of the book she applies her theoretical and historical constructions to *La vida entera, Composición de lugar, El*

fantasma imperfecto, La construcción del héroe, and *El enigma de la realidad* of Juan Martini, and to *En esta dulce tierra, La revolución es un sueño eterno, El amigo de Baudelaire,* and*La Sierva* of Andrés Rivera. These chapters contain textual analyses bound to be of interest to anyone studying the works in question. Perilli's arguments tend at once to draw heavily on the ideas she outlines at the beginning of her study and to support these ideas through example. Within a single work, as within the body of novels in general, she concentrates on broad thematic questions, leaving aside more local considerations of language, character, and plot. Unfortunately her prose style here does not become less abstract than in the first part, and the references she makes to the texts themselves, while perfectly suited to her arguments, are more scarce than one would like.

In the novel of the eighties, as opposed to that of the boom, "no existe el gran relato, las totalidades se han fracturado" (31). In a certain sense *Las ratas* is a "gran relato" of exactly the kind that, according to Perilli, Argentine novelists have ceased to produce. In it she draws the characteristics of the novel in Argentina as the military dictatorship was ending with broad theoretical strokes. She constructs, a scant few years later, an overarching structure into which we can place any fiction of the period. We must admire her for this despite the book's faults. It is a courageous sally into untrodden territory, and in the end a useful initial attempt to map the literary landscape of the 80s and early 90s.

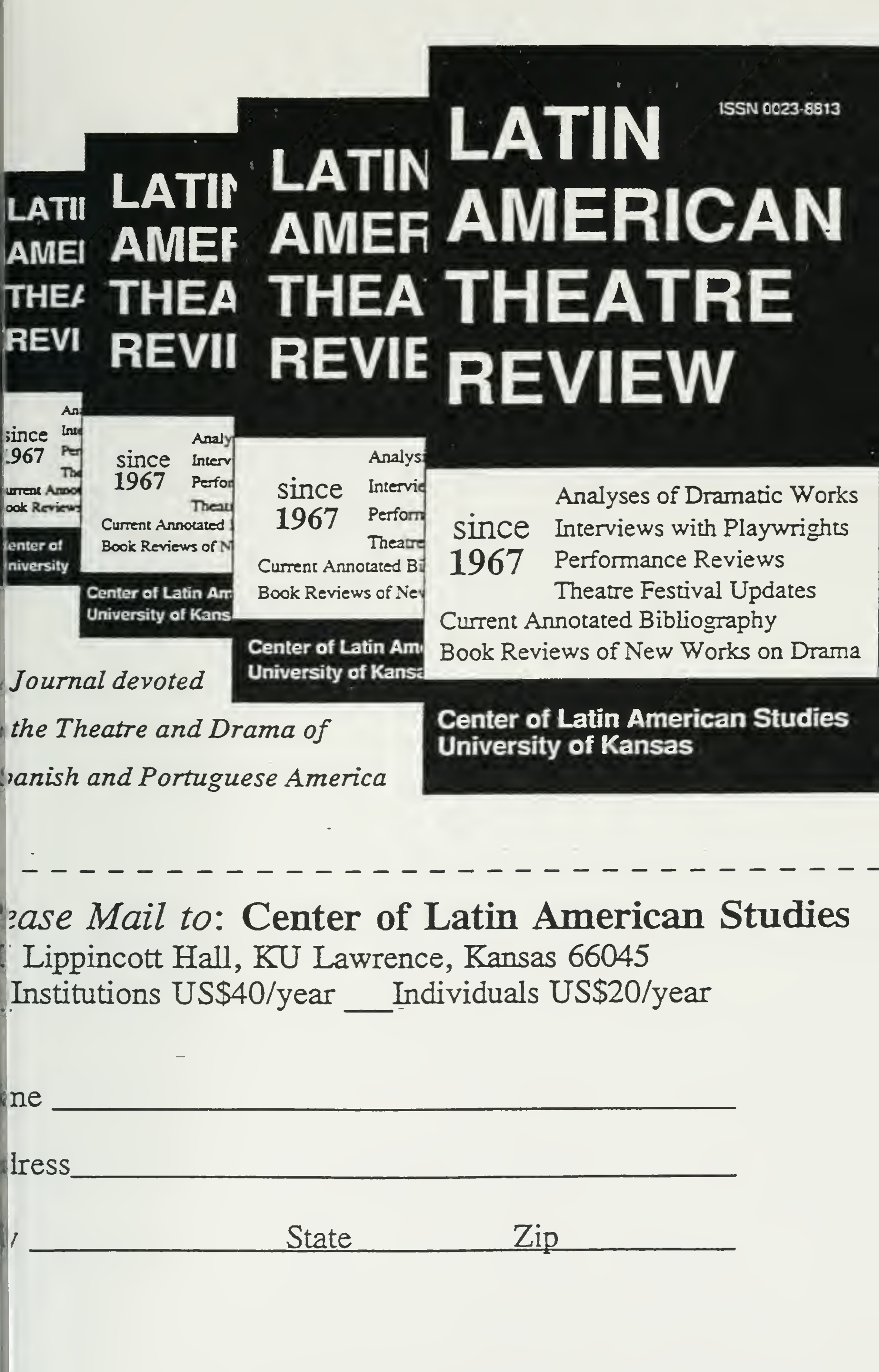
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